Almega

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Almega

by libran53

Summary

Eighteen year old Will Graham, an Omega orphan needs to marry an Alpha to secure his inheritance. When Will enters into a marriage of convenience with Hannibal Lecter neither realise the adjustments they will have to make.

Robert leaned back. "In one evening both you and Randall Tier have expressed a willingness to adjust your personalities in order to win the hand of this boy. Interesting how the one perceived the most submissive is controlling those considered the most dominant. You were never interested in Lithuanian fairy tales were you, Hannibal, never read about the Almega?" Robert watched as Hannibal gave a shrug of his shoulders. "Perhaps you should have."

Notes

The American Civil War ended in stalemate.
With both sides wanting a cessation of hostilities, the Peace Democrats brokered a treaty.The Confederacy survived as the Southern States of America, a de facto independent country supported by overseas allies. The northern states eventually became the United States of America.
Although Omegan rights are limited in both countries, only in the South were they denied the right to vote and denied the right of inheritance unless they can show Alpha influence in their lives.
One hundred and fifty years later things have not improved.
The Southern States of American comprise of: Louisiana, South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Texas.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

> "Duals used to be known as the two per centers because two per cent of male Omegas had duality. Today, we're closer to extinction level....."

They had holed up in a large barn with gambrel roof and wide doors which allowed the cars to be stored inside, away from prying eyes. The R V in the separate garage was of no further use to it's owner who lay dead in his kitchen alongside his wife. Hobbs had decided that the old cage, part of a collection of circus memorabilia left around the ranch, should be used to keep the boy safe and he kept the key to the lock, which was threaded on a piece of cord, around his neck.

Will had woken up cold. The place had been no better, no worse, than any other of the places he had been held.

"You are pretty, my pretty little boy." The usual greeting from Hobbs received the usual reply.

"Thank you, my Alpha." Will somehow had managed to force his mouth into a sweet smile as he looked into the man's one seeing eye.

Miggs, back from grocery shopping, handed Will a bottle of water and a packet of crackers which Will inspected carefully, making sure that neither had been opened. Hobbs shouted orders to a group of men who loaded up two of the cars with some of the groceries and a small arsenal of weapons. After giving out maps and checking the vehicles, Hobbs returned to the boy and took the cord from around his neck, with an up and over motion, and handed it to him through the bars.

"We're going hunting and will be back before sunrise. You be a good boy for your daddy?"

Will kept his smile sweet and nodded in response. He knew that hunting meant a home invasion across the state line, Hobbs knew better than to mess in his own front yard. With deliberate movements Will placed the key around his neck as he heard the barn doors being opened and saw a stream of light hit the cars. He consciously avoided looking towards the opening to watch the cars leave, pretending that the outside was a nuclear waste land had made his existence easier.

It was months later, when he had tried to re-arrange the jumbled sequence of events in his mind, he realised that Miggs had warned him. The man had sidled up to the cage and had whispered.

"They're coming. Stay low."

He had watched Miggs walk towards the back of the barn where the man had exited through a side door and it was then Will had decided to heed his words. Moving to the furthest corner of the cage, he had got down into a prone position, making sure that nearly every part of the front of his body came into contact with the wooden floor. The three men on the far side of the barn playing cards hadn't noticed the interlopers but Will had. Entering cautiously through the slightly opened barn doors, they had moved in single file. He counted six of them, before the shouting and the sound of gunfire, all dressed in black with protective headgear and weapons held shoulder high. With eyes squeezed tight and ears covered by his hands, the inescapable overwhelming fear left Will's mind with no choice other than to shut down.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Petition by the Northern Guardianship Advocates (NOGA) to the court for non-kinship foster care of William C Graham.
Opposed by: The Federal Bureau of Investigation, The State of Florida The State of Louisiana.

Preliminary hearing : Petitioner requests hearsay evidence to be admissible. Permission under advisement.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Twelve weeks later - Quantico, VA

Beverly was pissed. She looked at the two agents, no, two Special Agents, and tried to find the right words. After all, she was still a trainee and had been taught to show respect to other agents, especially when they could be watching her back one day.

"Shit." She shouted as she turned on her heels and run down the corridor. "Tell Crawford."

Their orders had been simple. Escort Will to the cafeteria, get him something to eat, bring him back to his room and keep him company. Chess, she had suggested, or some other board game. The intention had been to give her a break. Not that she minded being with Will, but after three solid months she needed some space. She had no idea where she was heading when she remembered the words Jack Crawford had said to Will when they first had arrived at Quantico.

Hands on the boy's shoulders, Jack had spoken in his best supportive voice. "Will, this isn't a playground. We do very important work here and there are some things a boy of your age shouldn't see. Agent Katz will take you to your quarters, but if you need to talk or feel troubled, then my door is always open."

It was a long shot but Beverly changed direction and headed towards Crawford's office. She was virtually over the threshold when a gruff voice to her right called out "***Katz with me***." By the time she had caught up with Crawford they had already entered the evidence room. Will was standing in front of the pin board with eyes closed, right hand held out as if reaching for something or somebody. Beverly knew it was the Overlander murders. Three young girls dead, mutilated, and their only connection were visits to the Overland campus library.

Will had seen the case file a week earlier. Jack, updating the boy about the FBI's pursuit of Garrett Jacob Hobbs, received a phone call. As was his habit when engaged in a lengthy conversation, Jack had got out of his chair and walked around the room. He told Beverly that he had only turned his back for a few moments, but it was enough time for Will to pick up the folder and flick through it. Jack had chastised him, but Will's only reply had been "*Your profile is wrong*."

Beverly found out about Jack's misstep later when she had reported that Will had been following the case, both through news broadcasts and Tattle.Crime. Now standing in the room she had an uneasy feeling come over her. When Will lowered his hand she broke the silence.

"What the hell, Will. You had us worried."

He looked at her with puppy dog eyes and although the tone of her voice hadn't been harsh, she felt bad.

"The profile is wrong. There are two killers, a man and a woman. They're together, like boyfriend and girlfriend or brother and sister. She gets jealous and he has to kill them to show he isn't interested in them any more. They've already been interviewed and gave alibis, they were each others alibi. He tries to date them and that's what gets these girls killed. They're gonna kill again 'cause they like it and 'cause they think they're in the clear."

It was a further week before the arrest. Brother and sister, incestuous relationship, everything fitted Will's profile. Nobody thanked Will, not even Beverly, because no one knew what to say. Several days after the arrest, Beverly was summoned to Jack's office. She had stood in front of his desk looking down at him as he tapped his pen on the report sheet.

"How do I write a report explaining how a fourteen year old Omega boy in witness protection helped solve a high profile murder case?"

Bev shrugged. "You could leave him out of it. Pretend the BAU saw a connection."

"Too much talk around the department." Crawford replied.

"Gag them. Threaten them with a posting to some backwater in the middle of nowhere."

"The talk has risen to the top." Jack sat back in his chair. "The doctor who examined Will said he has an empathy disorder. Allows him to understand the minds of others."

"Most Omega duals have empathy, Agent Crawford."

"Jack." said Crawford. "I've asked for you to be assigned to my team. My agents call me Jack."

Beverly couldn't suppress the smile. "Will is different, Jack. He doesn't read their minds, he gets into their head, knows how they think and feel."

"Like he did with Hobbs."

"He outmanoeuvred Hobbs to stay alive."

"By getting into his head and becoming him." Jack picked up the pen from his desk and tapped it against the palm of his hand. "The Guardianship have applied to the court, they want Will fostered by one of their own. They control his finances so now they want to control his welfare. The FBI hierarchy are against it, they believe Will's welfare is best served by staying at Quantico, at least until Hobbs is caught. There is also a suggestion that Will might be useful. Either way, once he is out of here, they feel that it wouldn't be inappropriate if you kept in touch."

"Sure, if that's what Will wants." said Beverly. "But I'm not going to push him, Jack. He's gone through hell."

"Agreed." Crawford replied.

Beverly gave a nod, acknowledging what had been requested of her, but determining that once Will left she had no intention of maintaining contact. She knew being useful to the FBI could ultimately be unhealthy for the young Omega. She hadn't risked her own life by rescuing him to throw him under the wheels of the FBI's bus.

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ADJUDICATORY AND DISPOSITIONAL HEARING - Hearsay evidence deemed admissible - emails entered into the court record.

From Jack Crawford
To Paul Jorgensen
Subject Will G

Dr. Greenaway wants further evaluation of subject. Suggestion of Stockholm syndrome/ participation of crimes under influence of Hobbs.
Personally questioned Miggs, Lee and Barlow. No evidence to substantiate claim.
Further statements from Lee and Barlow - Will G beaten on multiple occasions by Abigail Hobbs.
Petitioned police files - Oklahoma robberies - Will G present?
Denied Greenaway access.

From Paul Jorgensen
To Jack Crawford
Subject Will G

Two more cases. He's good. Oklahoma files - Will G's prints all over the property - books taken - Omegan health care and the Life and Times of Billy Graham. Will virtually wrote a letter.

From Cynthia Smith - Legal
To Jack Crawford
Subject Will G

Preliminary hearing next week.
Non-kinship guardianship - Dr. Frederick Chilton proposed by NOGA
Background check - clean - suggest we dig deeper.
Florida claim - boy's mother born in state.
Louisiana claim - subject born and raised in state. Additional claim - Will G adjudicated as delinquent for engaging in criminal activity. Greenaways report. They can't sink any lower.
Our objection - state mishandling of case led to death of Isabella and Georgia Graham.

It's all about the money, Jack.

From Cynthia Smith - Legal
To Jack Crawford/Paul Jorgensen
Subject Will G

Preliminary hearing - NOGA produced emails. Hacked?

From Paul Jorgensen
To Jack Crawford
Subject Will G

Leak from your office, Jack.

From Jack Crawford
To Paul Jorgensen

It was Will

To Jack Crawford
From Paul Jorgensen

FUCK!

Chapter End Notes

Paul Jorgensen in another universe would be David Lee, The Good Wife TV series

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When the American civil war ended in stalemate, the north kept their President, the south kept their General and the borders kept their own business. When President Fuller renamed the north, the United States of America, the river of public loyalty changed direction and headed upstream.

The seven states under republican flag stood shoulder to shoulder, same ideals, same laws until Florida gave Omegas the right to vote. The Beta party led the charge to join the union, the Alpha party did not. With opinion poll after opinion poll giving victory to the Betas, the Alphas won.

Ask any Omega in Florida why the voted for the Alphas, the reply is always the same. "Better the devil you know."

Cyrus James - THE OMEGAN HIGHWAY

SOUTHERN STATE RULES

In a surprise move the Supreme Court of the Seven Southern States has ratified the judgement in the case of Connor Lewis. Mr. Lewis, a Texas born Omega, married Joseph Chase, a New York born Alpha, in California. A pre-nuptial agreement included a transference of inheritance clause which came into effect when Mr. Lewis's father died six months after the marriage took place.

The state of Texas had argued that this was an arranged marriage and therefore Mr. Lewis could not legally inherit a share of his father's estate under the Southern State Rules Act. The Supreme Court of the United States ruled in favour of Mr. Lewis. As part of his summing up, Chief Justice Mario Carlton had said:

"The circumstances under which this marriage took place are not relevant. Alphas have entered into arranged marriages for centuries to further their social standing and for monetary gain. These marriages have never been legally challenged, so a precedent has been set. In this case only one rule can apply - what is good for the goose is good for the gander."

SAM WESTMORE
POLITICAL EDITOR
OMEGAN TRIBUNE (Archives)

Four years later - The Sanctuary , Health and Wellbeing Support Centre, Baltimore

Will Graham knew it by heart.

"My mother, my father, my sisters and brothers are all Omega, we are of the same blood, the same tissue but because of the duality of my reproductive system, I have been deemed not worthy of status. In the eyes of the law I am not human, nature's little joke. Today, in a courtroom, twelve of my peers decided that they don't give a damn what society has been taught. Today, they told the world that Oscar Warren, is an Omega and a dual.

Within forty eight hours dual tee shirts began appearing in stores all over the country. Within six months, the hated Section 1478b of the Status Act, which had stripped Omegas with duality of their rights, had been eradicated from the statue books.

Oscar Warren, who had been ably defended by Aaron Sutcliffe, would eventually become Chief Advisor for Omega Care when Sutcliffe became president. A television movie made during Sutcliffe's presidency depicting the events of the trial, broke viewing records. Many celebrities claimed to have had one Omega dual ancestor.

Although Will had been born some 30 odd years after the speech had been delivered on the courthouse steps, Oscar Warren was his hero. Warren, an Omega with duality, had reached the heights of success as a talk show host during a time when duals, in the Northern States did not officially exist. Section 1478b had been brought into being by the Beta Health Board to help stamp out the selling of Omega offspring by means of the dowry system. Male Omegas having the capability of becoming pregnant were so rare they fetched the highest price. Stripping them of their male status, their Omega dynamic and making them wards of the court, unless they were sterilised, was supposed to protect them. In reality, overnight they had become worthless. Disguising duality became a way of life as parents sought to find an appropriate mate in a foreign country. Oscar Warren had grown up during that era. Tired of hiding in plain sight, Warren outed himself during a live broadcast of his show and changed the future for hundreds of young men including Will Graham.

During his eighteen years of life Will had never questioned his status. The occasion when slurs had been thrown at him, he had followed his father's advice and had let them wash over him. He had grown comfortable in his own skin, liked his own company. As he gazed out of the window of the Baltimore Sanctuary, he had felt a strange sense of despondency growing inside of him which was in direct contrast to his usual disposition.

Dr. Chilton stopped writing in his journal and watched Will for several minutes. The boy stood almost motionless, staring straight ahead. Chilton got up and walked towards Will taking a position with his back against the wall nearest the window so he could see the boy's face.

"You appear lost in your thoughts."

"I was just thinking how life would have been much easier if I had been an Alpha. Do you ever think that way, Frederick?"

"My step-father was an Alpha so I gained certain advantages by default. Personally, I could never see myself as one, all that chest puffed up, looking hairy and aggressive. What's brought this on?"

Will gave out a long sigh. "The Guardianship has sent details of another three potential husbands. They are educated, good jobs and very, very bland."

"Trying to find suitable candidates and maintain an element of secrecy is proving to be rather difficult."

"I know I haven't made things easy, Frederick."

"No one is blaming you, Will."

Will struggled to find the words. "It's just these last three.....they don't feel right."

"I was under the impression Randall Tier and the Ryan brothers had found favour with you, given they appear to be spending every waking hour at this facility. More's the pity."

Will spoke with an exaggerated southern drawl. "Those gentlemen are so kind and courteous towards little old me but oh so vanilla."

Frederick smiled widely. A tinge in Will's voice brought back memories of Andy Graham. Briefly, Frederick was presented with an image of Andy standing next to Will, with his hand resting on his son's shoulder, his lazy grin emerging on his face.

"Do you trust me, Will?"

"Of course I trust you, Frederick."

"Then promise you will listen to what I have to say without interrupting. Promise." Will put his hand to his mouth and pulled an imaginary zip across his lips.

"A very old acquaintance of mine from a very respectable family has a nephew. The nephew is thirty, very good looking, great sense of humour. Owns a construction company and lives on a farm which being a farm, of course, has animals and you know that you love animals, Will, don't you? He loves theatre and music but is primarily an outdoors man, fishing, riding and doing all those kind of things that men like him would do outdoors. His parents live near Baltimore, he has siblings and is quite interested in meeting you."

"What's the catch, Frederick?"

"Will, you promised."

"Frederick, the catch?"

"He has joint nationality so would qualify." Frederick hesitated for a moment before spitting out. "He lives in Lithuania."

Will shook his head in disbelief. "You're getting me a pen pal."

"Will, this could work." Frederick enthused. "He would live in Baltimore for six months and you are allowed to go overseas for four weeks a year, so you would be apart for just a few months. It's doable. I know couples who live in the same house and don't spend that amount of time together."

"That's called breakdown of a marriage, Frederick."

"Did I tell you he is good looking?"

"Frederick, what have you done?"

"I've arranged to meet with his parents."

"Aw, Frederick." Will took a deep breath. "Okay, what's his name?"

"Lecter." said Frederick. "Valdas Lecter."

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal Tristan Lecter takes over the stage next chapter.

Chapter 4

Hannibal Tristan Lecter loved Sundays. As a child growing up on the Du Maurier estate, Sunday was always the one day of the week the family was guaranteed to spend together. With his busy schedule, Robert Lecter would always ensure this one day would be kept for his family "*Business has no business on a Sunday*." would be the response to anyone who made overtures regarding his availability.

Hannibal had found the same ideology when, at the age of fourteen. he joined his brother in Lithuania for what was called "*his becoming*." He had fond memories of visiting his grandparents and various family members which took place always on a Sunday. Two years younger than his brother, he had found the transition from Baltimore to Lithuania easy with Valdas as his guide. Where as Hannibal and Valdas were alike in both looks and temperament and often mistaken for twins, the actual twins of the family, Alana and Robert Zeller, were total opposites.

Returning to Baltimore six years later, he soon settled back into a routine. Eventually buying his own house in the city - he never regarded it as a home - it became a convenient place to entertain friends, business colleagues and lovers. The house was representative of the cool, professional side of his personality, the side the public would view. The other side he kept hidden except from his family and those closest to him.

Hannibal picked up his cup and sipped the coffee, watching Robert press his fork into the last piece of sausage on the plate and place it into his mouth. His father always ate with precision so there had been a long gap between him ascertaining all three of his children were free that morning and stating that he would appreciate if they would be present in the sitting room at ten o'clock. Appreciate was the word Robert used instead of expect. Naturally they all acquiesced. Explaining their Uncle Donald would be present with a guest, no more discussion had taken place. None of them pressed their father for any further information, Robert hated repetition and what needed to be said would be discussed at the meeting.

Hannibal had sauntered down to the sitting room after hearing the voices drift up the stairs to his room. Having to postpone his original plans for the day, he filled the gap between breakfast and meeting by reading and replying to his emails. Entering the sitting room and seeing Zeller and Alana sitting together on the small couch, he had carefully wedged himself between them earning a playful jab in the ribs from his sister's elbow. To his right on the larger couch sat his mother and father adopting a near identical pose to each other and straight ahead sitting in the French leather wing back chairs were his uncle and the guest. Hannibal had observed over the years, no matter the size of the chair, Donald always looked uncomfortable with his long legs stretched out and his slightly forward sitting position, almost as if he was set to give chase. The guest looked just as uncomfortable sitting almost bolt upright, his hands were placed flat on a folder, which was resting on his thighs.

Robert looked directly at his children as he spoke. "Dr. Chilton is the Chief Administrator at the Baltimore Sanctuary. He is here today at my request. The matter to be discussed may also

affect Valdas and having already told me his views, for the purpose of this meeting, I shall be his representative. Dr. Chilton if you could begin."

"I have in my care a young boy named Will Graham, well not a boy anymore as he recently reached the age of majority. Will is an Omega and has duality. If that is a problem?" Frederick glanced around the room and was met with a collective of shrugs.

"Pregnancy amongst male Omegas is not uncommon in Lithuania." said Robert

"Unfortunately acceptance is not universal and the idea is sometimes met with revulsion." Frederick stated

"In some countries the Alpha knot is considered grotesque. Many males after completion of breeding undergo a surgical procedure which ensures that the knot is permanently deflated. There is evidence to show that in some ancient civilizations Alpha rulers, when passing on the reins of power, were deflated in public as a testament to their courage." Alana announced

Frederick sat in stunned silence.

"You will have to excuse my daughter, Dr. Chilton. She is a walking encyclopaedia of information most people do not wish to know." said Robert

"On the contrary." Frederick's voice hinted at sarcasm. "At this precise moment I am silently giving thanks to mother nature for my Beta dynamic. Although the mental image your daughter's words have conjured up will probably stay with me till the end of my days."

Frederick shifted his position in the chair. "If I may get straight to the point. Will through tragic circumstances is heir to a sizeable inheritance but as an Omega born in Louisiana he is affected by the notorious Southern State Rules. His options are simple. Either marry an Alpha or return south where he has to live for six consecutive months every year or relinquish his inheritance. He has chosen option one. Over the last few weeks he has met with a series of suitors including Randall Tier. I believe you know him."

"Yes, his father is Senator Harland Tier. Senator Tier and I orbit the same sun." Robert gave a nod indicating Donald.

"Part of Will's estate includes the freehold titles to parcels of land some of which are in Lithuania. Will's future husband will be entitled to a dowry from the Graham estate. Randall Tier's mother is of Lithuanian extraction and they have indicated that Randall's dowry should consist of the titles not only to lands occupied by her family but also her neighbours including the Lecters." Frederick watched as the information filtered around the room. He wrinkled his nose. "Personally, I think they are being a tad greedy."

"Is that legal?" asked Zeller

"Perfectly." replied Robert. "Ownership rights are inviolable."

"But if the boy has chosen Randall?" Bedelia queried

"He hasn't. I'm afraid they have jumped the gun." replied Frederick. "Will has expressed to me a certain dissatisfaction with the calibre of the candidates. Will can be a little bit of a romantic, wanting the knight on his sturdy steed to come and sweep him off his feet. He's looking for someone, as he puts it, with some fire in their belly. Instead, he has Randall Tier with all the charisma of an animated corpse and of course my favourites, the Ryan brothers, whose idea of an adventure weekend would be whipping out their guitars and singing another rendition of Home on the Range. I approached Donald out of courtesy as the matter of the dowry could affect members of this family."

"When Frederick spoke to me I saw an opportunity not just for this family but for Will Graham as well." said Donald

Robert pressed the palms of his hands together as if in prayer. "We all know the importance of the land so I took the decision to speak to Valdas. No one in this room has more to lose than he. After giving the matter some thought, subject to certain conditions, he has agreed to meet with the boy. I understand you have the photographs." He turned to Frederick.

"This is nothing short of an Omega auction." Alana's voice full of indignation.

"I agree." snapped Frederick. "But what choice is there? If Will returns to the south there is a possibility of abduction and forced bonding. His philosophy is simple, better wed than bred then dead. I wish things were different, but my only concern is for Will to be happy and safe and if I didn't think you could provide such an environment, I wouldn't be here."

Hannibal sat calmly appraising the situation. The land meant everything to the Lecters. It was more than the soil, it was the unique way of life it offered. Even his father's choice of career had been influenced by the desire to track down the title holder and reclaim ownership. The quest to return the land to the Lecters had been paramount, their own holy grail. A smile crossed Hannibal's face with the realisation that the grail wasn't just living close by, it was calling out to them.

"The tragic circumstances connected to this boy, there is a story behind those words."

Frederick looked up in surprise reacting to the authority in the voice. He looked into brown eyes and slightly wilted under the gaze. Hannibal had been quiet throughout the meeting but not invisible. There was a power that exuded from the pores of his skin, a scent more obvious than the others and Frederick had been constantly aware of it.

Frederick brought his hand to his mouth and coughed nervously. "The official records are sealed as Will was a minor and the FBI's details are somewhat redacted. I can tell you that Will's father was Andrew Graham and his mother Isabella Cassini. The had three children, Marissa, Georgia and Will. The Grahams lived modestly, nothing ostentatious, but somehow they came under the scrutiny of one Garrett Jacob Hobbs, a low grade Alpha. His plan was to abduct Marissa, force her into a bond and well, I think you guess the rest. If any Alpha offspring were produced then they would automatically take precedence over any Omega children under Southern State Rules. Hobbs and his gang raided the Graham residence and it all went terribly wrong. I don't know what kind of man they thought Andrew Graham was but he fought to his very last breath protecting his family. Isabella was also injured which allowed Hobbs to take not one child but all three. The gang crisscrossed state lines for

months. First Marissa died, then Georgia escaped, her body was eventually found and that left Will. I believe Hobbs had a daughter named Abigail and she contacted Isabella who by then had recovered. Isabella was persuaded to leave with this girl and was reunited with Will. The FBI were finally called in and they rescued Will."

"And Isabella?" asked Bedelia

"Hobbs killed her."

"The boy could not have gone through such events and come out unscathed."

Frederick could hear the concern in Bedelia's voice. "When he first came to the sanctuary he experienced night terrors and bouts of sleepwalking. After a year, when he began to finally feel safe, they diminished. As he grew older and more confident he told me he no longer wanted to be seen as a victim but as a survivor."

"The traumatised are unpredictable because they know they can survive what was done to them. By choosing to view himself as a survivor indicates that he could see a future for himself. How would you describe his character."

Frederick paused for a moment before answering Bedelia. "Will is warm, gentle and deep. He takes friendship seriously and is very loyal to all his friends. Not that he is perfect, he can be very stubborn, we occasionally call him Willful Graham."

"If you have the photographs?" Robert said quietly

"Oh, yes." Frederick opened the folder which was on his lap. "I'm afraid Will doesn't care to be photographed so some of these were taken surreptitiously." He extracted one photograph at a time passing them to Donald, giving each a setting. "This one is for his sanctuary pass, this one he was asleep in an armchair, this one he is smiling because I had a mishap trimming my eyebrows."

As the photographs were passed along the line of Lecters, Bedelia remarked "He is very .....I would say beautiful."

"Will has a certain quality." Frederick spoke without looking up, still rifling through the folder.

Hannibal eyes scanned each image as it was handed to him, hoping to glimpse a fraction of the emotional nucleus of the boy and finding it in the very last one. Full face but with head slightly shifted to the left, the eyes appeared darker, sadder with a suggestion of loneliness. For a moment Hannibal was lost in the look, only distracted when he heard Frederick muttering. Looking up he could see the man still searching through the folder.

"No, not this one, oh Will." Frederick closed the folder with the offending item inside.

Hannibal, suddenly in the Beta's eye line, pointed at the folder and beckoned with his hand. Frederick gave a small shrug of the shoulders and a quick shake of the head. Frederick's sense of assertion over the Alpha due to his small act of defiance quickly evaporated as he

watched Hannibal ease himself out of the couch and walk towards him like a lion striding through its pride. Hannibal stopped directly in front of him, hand held out, fingers in a beckoning motion.

"May I?" Frederick looked up at the figure towering over him and cursed himself as he ducked his head Omega fashion, quickly forfeiting the remaining photograph on his lap. Hannibal looked long and hard at the image.

"He appears to be in a restraint."

"Will's idea of a joke." Frederick watched as the item was passed to Bedelia. "The sanctuary has a museum which includes artefacts which were used in the treatment of those deemed mentally ill. I am afraid Will's misuse of the restraint was to ward off those suitors he deemed unsuitable. He would send them a copy of that photograph with a note saying he was looking forward to seeing them when he felt better."

"When can I meet him?"

Frederick looked aghast. "Pardon?"

"Do you have an objection to my meeting this boy?" Hannibal frowned.

Frederick floundered. "Surprised yes, objection er, um, no."

Hannibal returned to the couch. "When?" He asked.

Frederick's mouth opened and closed a few times before he stuttered. "Today?"

"Good, I will go freshen up." Came the response.

With some distance between them, Frederick's intestinal fortitude suddenly rose from the depths. "As long as we understand one thing. Where Will is concerned, there is no test driving the vehicle before purchase."

Clamping a hand on his brother's knee, Hannibal smiled. "That is why my brother will accompany me, to ensure my virtue."

Zeller gave his brother a quizzical look before both rose and left the room. They were halfway down the hallway when Zeller put a hand on Hannibal's arm. "What are you playing at Han? If you're planning on sabotaging the meeting between Valdas and the Omega count me out. I don't want the fall out from father."

Hannibal stopped and looked at him. "I am not intending sabotage, more like damage control. There may be a deal to be done with this boy and I would like to explore the possibility."

"You heard Chilton. This boy's options are running out."

Hannibal kept his voice low. "I have sympathy, but it is the life of Valdas I care about not this boy's."

Zeller shook his head. "This boy just needs to get married. Is that what you want, to marry him?"

"It is not what I want but rather what I do not want. I do not want our brother leaving his home and returning to a city he rejected years ago. I do not want our brother living a lie, pretending to be happy when he was not. I will talk to this Will Graham and maybe an arrangement can be procured that will suit us both. He is surrounded by sycophants pouring out flattery, which is nothing more than greed masquerading as affection. I will take a direct approach and will be honest. I think good Will may find me hard to resist."

Chapter 5

The drive to the sanctuary had been in silence, not an uncomfortable silence, they both just shared a common dislike for small talk. Zeller had always been able to read Hannibal, known when to talk, when to interject with an idea, when to shut up and Hannibal had appreciated this side of their relationship.

Hannibal had kept the Bentley a safe distance back from Chilton's Chrysler. He smiled at first, thinking how the car well suited the man driving it, but had become impressed how Chilton took the sharp bends that marked the road to the sanctuary. Hannibal had increased the speed around one sharp bend and was surprised to see Chilton's car gone, nowhere in sight on the road ahead. Zeller pointed right and Hannibal saw an entrance that on most days he would have missed.

They travelled down a narrow lane which eventually revealed a car park dominated by a large red brick building. Finding a empty space next to Chilton's car, Hannibal got out of the Bentley and stood for a moment studying the outer façade of the sanctuary. It was of neo Jacobean style with Dutch gables, large chimney stacks and a prominent cupola. Wide stone steps lead up to the entrance.

"Thinking how many apartments you could create." Zeller stood next to him, looking up at the building.

Hannibal nodded. "I would estimate it was built around one hundred years ago, hopefully the interior will not disappoint. Were you aware of it's existence?"

"Brought a couple of patients here from the clinic a while back. The hidden entrance had me fooled, kept driving up and down the road for half an hour before I saw it." Zeller laughed.

By the time they had nearly caught up to him, Chilton was already climbing the stairs and on reaching the main entrance, he turned and waited for the brothers. From the way he walked into the foyer, both Hannibal and Zeller could tell that they were now entering Chilton's domain. He spoke to the guards sitting behind a counter and after a few minutes turned and handed the brothers two visitor's passes.

"If you don't mind for the duration." The smile as he spoke was one of confidence. They were on his territory and he was no longer at a disadvantage. Frederick nodded to one of the guards and a buzzer sounded, a guard stood up and walked over to a door, holding it open until all three of them had walked through.

The interior did not fail to impress Hannibal. As they walked down a flight of steps into a large chamber, Hannibal took in many of the features which were visible. Ahead of him lay another staircase which swept up to the next level and onto a mezzanine. From where he was standing, he viewed another smaller flight of steps which lead down to the floor of the chamber.

"This area was used primarily for inmates to receive both treatment and visitors. They were placed in cages with no expectation of privacy. We have one of the cages in the museum. Of course, nowadays we use this space positively, exercise classes, dance classes. Will is a very good dancer and always partners one of the clients. We even have the occasional sing-a-long and Will being quite a good piano player often leads the charge with some of the more traditional songs I find the use of music to be quite therapeutic."

The sound of a door slamming interrupted Frederick's recitation and a man slowly walked towards the group, broom held in one hand. Hannibal noticed the man's unusual appearance, a square, well nourished body was topped by a square shaped head. The blue coveralls the man wore seemed to exacerbate the look.

"Problems, Frederick." The man stopped short of the stairs, hands clasped one over the other resting on the tip of the broom handle, chin perched on top. "A southern gentleman approached Will in the grounds."

"Is Will alright?" Frederick's whole body tensed.

"He's fine. Soon as the man approached him, he skedaddled inside and up to his room."

"How on earth did this happen, Abel? Where were the guards?" Frederick's voice began to rise.

"Short staffed, Frederick." Came the reply.

"Didn't you request extra men?"

Abel gave out a long sigh. "They only had Alphas, Frederick. You said no Alphas because they are all cock and no common sense."

Frederick gave a quick glance in the direction of the Lecters. "I don't think they were my exact words. Has the man left the grounds? Did you check the security footage?"

The man let out an even longer sigh. "Not content with my being chief cook and bottle washer, you are trying to add more to the heavy load which sits upon my back. I suppose I could shove the handle of this broom part way up my own ass and walk backwards so I could clean as I go." The man stood upright, picked up the broom midway down the handle and walked up the stairs towards the foyer, giving a nod to the brothers as he passed them.

"You check the footage, Frederick and I'll do everything else. Don't forget to tell Will he's expected to help prepare this evening's meals." Gideon called out as he disappeared from view.

As Frederick walked up the sweeping staircase towards his and Will's living area he turned briefly to speak to the brothers. "I'm afraid our Mr. Gideon is a law unto himself."

Zeller gave a quick raised eyebrow before they followed Chilton up the second staircase. They turned right when they reached the top of the stairs to a door. Adjacent to it,

a keypad was attached to the wall. The Beta tapped at it for a few moments before another buzzer sounded and Chilton opened the door.

"Here we are gentlemen." Frederick announced as he escorted them down a short hallway and through another doorway. "My office."

It was the second time an interior had caught Hannibal by surprise. He had imagined Chilton to surround himself with the pretentious and tacky, instead the walls were a pale cream colour and only his credentials framed in black and a few photographs in similar frames adorned the walls. Two floor to ceiling bookcases were centrally placed opposite a dark mahogany desk which had the finest quality inlaid top. Hannibal walked toward it and ran the tips of his fingers along the edge.

"It's beautiful, isn't it? Will bought it for my birthday. Chose it himself. The bookcase behind the door houses Will's own collection of books. It will give you an example of his taste."

Hannibal joined his brother and scanned the books. Besides the standard thesaurus, dictionary and maps of the world, the rest of the books covered of a wide range. He heard a voice first then caught site of the figure as he bounded through the door. Hannibal knew that the boy had scented them rather than seen them, as he reached Chilton he had darted behind the man and then looked anxiously towards the brothers.

"It's alright, Will, these are the Lecter brothers."

The Omega relaxed. "Sorry, got spooked earlier." The voice was light with an accent that was hard to place, everywhere and yet nowhere in particular.

"This is Hannibal Lecter and his brother, Robert Zeller Lecter."

"The architect and the doctor. Why are they here, Frederick?"

"Well, um..." Chilton began to flounder. "Their brother being in Lithuania...."

"Are they checking me out?"

"Yes" Hannibal took the opportunity to study the Omega. Dark curls framed the face and the eyes, a grey blue mix, were enhanced by long black lashes. "My brother is prepared to travel a great distance to meet you and it would be in his best interest to see if you would be suitable for someone in his social position."

The boy was defensive. "Perhaps I won't find him suitable."

"Perhaps not and far better to discover the fact early than to waste precious time. Besides there is the question of reputation and whether you have one that follows you."

"Reputation?" The boy almost spluttered out. "I read about you all the time in Tattle.Society. Freddie Lounds said that you spend the whole week partying and chasing women."

"Freddie Lounds exaggerates. It is only six days of the week, I rest on Sundays." Hannibal said with a slight smile .

Will shrugged. "I don't know why she keeps writing about you, it's not that you're interesting."

"If I am not interesting, then why do you persist in reading about me?" Hannibal watched as the boy's face reddened. "You gather information from an unreliable source. You should broaden your horizons in order to obtain a balanced view."

"Freddie may be unreliable but she provokes debate. Guess our conversation proves it. Besides she takes risks and I like that."

"We all have types, Will, which is another reason why I am here, to discover if you are my brother's type. You admire Freddie Lounds because she takes risks and by taking risks she puts herself in danger and sometimes endangers the lives of others. Are you attracted to those who skate around danger or are you attracted to those who are dangerous?"

"I think maybe a tour of the facility. This verbal swordplay is quite entertaining but some of us have to work for a living even on a Sunday." Frederick gestured with his arm towards the doorway then headed out of the room. "Gentlemen."

Zeller followed immediately behind Chilton with Hannibal next in the line. When they reached the door, Hannibal stepped aside and allowed Will to go first. As Will reached him, the Omega stopped momentarily and grey eyes looked straight at the Alpha.

"Both" The boy whispered and carried on walking.

Chapter 6

The procession continued along the inner depths of the sanctuary. Chilton had showed them the workings of the kitchen, the therapy rooms, the Jacuzzi, steam rooms and everything else Hannibal wasn't remotely interested in. Zeller enthused as only one medical professional could do with another, so out of consideration of his brother, Hannibal made the appropriate noises of interest. It hadn't been long after leaving Chilton's office that he saw Chilton take the Omega aside and speak briefly to him. The boy nodded in agreement and somehow managed to latch on to the back of the group. It didn't matter how many times Hannibal held the door open for him and allowed him to walk through first, the boy would somehow position himself eventually at the tail end.

The museum was the only part of the tour which peaked Hannibal's interest. Housed in what Frederick had described as the tombs of the building, both the Lecters found the posters on the walls and information boards, given details of the treatment of patients in a bygone era, more than disturbing. They walked along the gloomy corridors which contained the cells and one of the therapy cages. Hannibal was drawn to a cell at the end of the block, it was different from the rest, obviously recently occupied. Besides the plush looking blanket on the cot, the walls were adorned by pictures from magazines, posters and maps of the southern states. He wasn't there long when the others joined him.

Hannibal turned to Will. "Is this where you sleep?"

Chilton began to speak but the look that was thrown his way by Hannibal shut him up immediately.

Will nodded. "When I first arrived, Frederick let me have the key so I could lock myself in. It was the only place I felt safe."

Hannibal moved further into the cell taking a closer look at the images taped to the walls. He recognised the various landmarks and pointed to one of the larger posters.

"Is this New Orleans?"

Will took a step closer. "Yeah, lived there for a while. My hometown is about two hours drive from there."

"Did you ever want to go back?"

The Omega shook his head as he lowered his gaze. Chilton stepped quickly into the cell and put an arm around the boy's shoulder and guided him to the exit.

"Lets go." Chilton said, leading the way out of the cell.

The warmth of the sun on his back felt good, as they walked across the manicured lawn, and took the edge off the chill Hannibal had felt during the tour of the sanctuary. He had found the place unsettling although he couldn't find a logical reason to explain the feeling. Ahead were two tables centrally placed on the grass and Hannibal noted the four young men. Randall Tier he knew, the other three with their similar features, he assumed to be the Ryan brothers.

Tier acknowledged the approaching group first. "Hi Hannibal, Zeller, surprised to see you here. Is it a visit or have they finally decided to put you away?"

"Just visiting, Randall." Zeller said flatly.

"How's Will?" Randall gave a wide grin in Will's direction.

"Will's fine." Chilton replied coldly. "And why are you here, you're not due until Wednesday?"

"Just passing, Frederick. Perhaps some refreshments?" Hannibal could see Frederick bristle at Randall's words.

"Perhaps you would like to see the maze, it was designed specifically to help those with short term memory loss." Frederick addressed his words directly to Zeller, ignoring the other request.

"You have stables. If you do not mind, Dr. Chilton, I would be most interested." Hannibal spoke with deference, mindful of their audience.

"Yes, of course."

"I'll show him." Will volunteered. With hesitancy clear on Frederick's face, Will reassured him. "I'll be fine, Frederick."

Will set off with Hannibal a few paces behind.

"Were you instructed to observe protocol." Hannibal remarked.

"Frederick said it was the polite thing to do." Will could never understand why Omegas walked three paces behind Alphas in certain circumstances. It had never sat well with him, just another subtle reminded of the lower status of his dynamic.

"You understand that protocol is designed to keep you safe." Hannibal was almost at his side as they entered brick built stable block. "You are too trusting. You already had a stranger gain access to the grounds and now you walk into empty stables with another."

"They're not empty." Will made a sweeping gesture with his arm towards the horses. "Besides, I can take care of myself."

Hannibal moved fast. He grabbed Will by his shoulders and spun him round. Off balance Will began to topple backwards. The Alpha snaked an arm around his waist and with a hand on his arm, pushed him backward three quick paces until Will's back was pressed against the

brick wall. Quickly taking one wrist in each of his hands, Hannibal gently pulled the boy's arms upwards in a smooth action before the boy had time to react. For a moment there was silence as Hannibal looked down into grey eyes. Bodies close but not touching, Hannibal watched as the Omega, involuntarily, closed his eyes and breathed in the Alpha's scent.

"Never trust a stranger, Will and never lead the way into an isolated area with a stranger at your back. Always be aware of your surroundings and always keep your eyes open. Have I made my point?" Hannibal softly said.

Within moments Hannibal suddenly became aware of the slight pressure on his back and as it increased, he could feel three distinct points, evenly spaced, in a vertical line right of his spine.

"Have I made my point?" The familiar voice behind soon registered. "All three of them."

Hannibal released Will's wrists and slowly raised his hands skywards. He could see a wide grin appear on the Omega's face.

"It's alright, Abel. He was giving me a lesson in self defence."

"Yet, it is Mr. Lecter who is standing with his hands in the air with my pitchfork tickling his ribs."

Hannibal felt the pressure removed from his back and heard the footfall of the Beta moving away. He stepped back from the Omega as he lowered his hands and turned to look left. Hannibal saw the back of Gideon disappearing into the gloom of the far end of the stables and watched as he gave a mock wave with the pitchfork held aloft in his right hand.

"I underestimated the staff." Hannibal stated.

"Family." Will said "They're my family."

Chapter 7

She was a chestnut with four white socks and as soon as Will stood at the stall, she moved towards him.

"Frederick and Abel found her on one of the farms. She'd been left when the owners moved out, abandoned. She was so sick they didn't think she would make it but brought her back anyway. So I nursed her for weeks, her teeth were floated and hooves fixed. Brushed her everyday. One day she decided she had something to live for and just got better."

The horse and Will were cheek to cheek and Hannibal watched as the boy's fingertips slowly stroked the animal's neck.

"What do you call her?"

"Dreamer. Stupid name, but she gazes into the distance sometimes as if she is in a world of her own."

"And she is yours?"

"Yeah, I ride her whenever I can. I sometimes take a few of the patients out with me as part of their therapy, but it's best when I just let her run. Frederick said I can take her with me when I leave."

Hannibal noticed the items scattered around the stables. "Does this have a use other than for horses?"

Will gave a slight laugh. "Another museum. All part of the therapy. It's to distract patients, make them believe that this isn't just a treatment centre."

Will watched as Hannibal inspected the implements carefully arranged on the wall.

"You have a good selection. Authentic?"

"Yeah, local farms. Many foreclosed so Frederick and Abel would always find something they could buy and give a very good price." Will emphasised the last part of the sentence.

Will's eyes drifted from the top of Hannibal's head down his back to his legs. He had observed the graceful masculinity in the man, he may have been tall but he was light footed and his walk reminded Will of a panther. His eyes now wandered back up the legs to his rear when he was suddenly aware that Hannibal had stopped talking and had turned to face him. Will instinctively looked down, feeling his face blush.

"You have the same type of implements but in varying sizes."

"Abel thinks they were crafted for different groups, men, women and children."

Hannibal turned back to the items and Will's gaze turned back to the Alpha. His eyes travelled down the legs and up again. He hadn't been aware he had a height preference but liked the fact that Hannibal was taller and broader. Even through the clothing he could see the man was muscular and not muscle bound. He was momentarily lost in his thoughts before he sensed the Alpha's stare and quickly returned his gaze to the floor.

"Not fond of eye contact."

"No....err.....the eyes are the windows to the soul." Will said the first thing that came into his head.

"A traditional Omegan belief?"

Will walked towards Hannibal as casually as possible. "No, my grandmother, Grandma Graham."

"Was she the family sage?"

"No, just crazy." Will replied. "She had a houseful of stray dogs and when she couldn't find any more would steal the neighbour's dogs. Only got caught when she took the sheriff's dog out of his car. She believed in all stuff, reincarnation, everything. She had wanted to be an Egyptologist when she was young and not crazy."

"She sounds a very interesting woman."

"Yeah, I loved her and she loved me right back." A smile appeared on Will's face and then a look, as if he was remembering a past event. Suddenly he ducked his head and the moment was gone.

"You carry a lot of unhappiness on your shoulders. You pretend to be carefree with carefully crafted words but each time you talk about your past and get to close to something you are not ready to deal with, you shut down."

"It's called survival."

"With all your money what would be the one thing you would purchase?"

"And that tells you what about me?" Will countered

"I am just curious."

"A time machine, preferably one that works. And you, what would you buy."

"If I were in your shoes, I would buy the same." Hannibal tilted his head to one side. "Are you happy here, Will?"

"Yes." The reply was without hesitation.

"You could enter into a marriage of convenience and remain at the sanctuary."

"No, I can't. Frederick was given custody by the courts. If it seemed I was unwilling to leave it could trigger a court investigation into my mental state, a psychological evaluation, then maybe a competency hearing and wouldn't the southern states just love that."

Will looked at the Alpha, no flickering with the eyes from tie to mouth, just a steady unblinking stare into brown eyes.

"Why are you here? Why are you really here?"

"You hold the title of land which once belonged to my family. We would like it back. If marriage is the only way to secure this land, then I am here to see if we could strike a deal."

His words, at first, were met with stunned silence by the Omega. "At least your honest, the others just pretend they don't see the dollar sign in front of the Graham name."

Hannibal had read the boy's face from the moment they first met, anxiety, puzzlement and now, as he watched the Omega turn to look anywhere but at the man in front of him, he saw humiliation.

"I am sorry, Will, I did not mean to be quite so blunt, but I have a dislike for lying as much as you do." Hannibal spoke softly.

"Okay." Will turned back shoving his hand in the pockets of his jeans, head kept low.

"You would have preferred if I had courted you, pretended that I care about when I only had one agenda."

Will's head snapped up. "You! I thought your brother was the interested party."

"He is and so am I. I am not here to speak for my brother but for myself. I would like to spend some time with you and hopefully see if we could find common ground. If I were to make you an offer of marriage it would be a simple contract. Marriage for five years, for you to become part of a family that would be mindful of the Omega's needs and show respect. The Omega to be persuaded to continue his education and be allowed to follow the career of his own choosing. To be helped to become fully independent and that full support would be given after the contract had ended."

"Wow." said Will "Sounds like something family services would draw up. I've already rejected similar offers."

"What are your requirements?"

"To be safe and happy." He glanced at Hannibal. "To be part of an Alpha family because they want me not because they were obliged to care for me under the law and I want children of my own."

"You are young, you have plenty of time later to have a family."

"That part is non negotiable. I want children as soon as possible."

"A replacement for those you have lost."

"If you like."

"To bring a child into the world to satisfy one's feelings of loss could be viewed as unhealthy. The expectations put upon the child...."

Will snapped. "There would be none. They would be my own flesh and blood and I would love them unconditionally."

"You sound immature and like a slave to your own biology." Hannibal's words caught Will totally by surprise and he knew any attempt on his part to counter the Alpha's statement was futile, and he felt his eyes well up with tears.

"Is that something you are afraid of, that your new Alpha family would abandon you and you would be alone again, but if you had a child they would be tied to you." Hannibal took a few steps forward sensing the distress in the boy and placed a hand on the boy's arm.

"If I had Alpha children, in a custody battle I would lose. An Alpha sire would always get control. Even if the children were Omega, the best I could hope for would be joint custody. Whoever I marry will be for keeps. I know what I want."

"Things are changing, Will. Omegas have more rights than ever before. The days when Omegas were tied to the home and looked after the Alpha and their children are ending. More and more Omegas are rightfully taking a place in the workforce."

"Yeah, right." His voice dripped with sarcasm and he pulled away. "They're all forced to work and then look after their Alpha and children when they get home in the evening. Progress."

"My family have always actively helped improved the rights of Omegas. They would not abandon you, Will neither would I. You would always have our support."

"You don't understand us. Alphas and Betas like to think they do but they don't."

"What do we not understand about you, Will?"

"Everything." Will hissed.

Hannibal realised the focus of the conversation had drifted to one person rather than a whole dynamic. He observed as Will made his way back to his horse, the animal raised her head and pushed her muzzle against Will's stretched out hand. He waited for several moments allowing the boy to calm down before joining him, deliberately changing the timbre of his voice to sound more soothing.

"It is not my intention to be cruel, though it may seem that way to you at this moment. You would not have the threat of returning to somewhere you believe you would be at risk and you would be able to keep which is rightfully yours. During our time together, you may even meet the man of your dreams and you would be free to follow your heart."

Will burst out laughing. "We're not even married and you're already condoning my possible adultery. You're unbelievable."

"No, Will, I am being practical. We both would get what we want."

Will took a deep breath. "Okay, so this merest idea of an offer, how long before I have to decide?"

"However long it takes."

"And your brother."

"Whether you meet my brother or not is irrelevant. The truth of the matter is whoever you choose, in reality, you will be marrying a stranger. At least with the Lecters your safety is guaranteed, and with me, you know you would be free to leave if you so wished."

"I have to get back to the others." Will walked towards the exit and called out. "Do you think your family will like me?"

"I like you, Will and I am sure they would see the same qualities in you which I see."

As he watched Will leave the stables, he became aware of the figure emerging from the shadows to his right.

"Didn't go quite as you expected, Mr. Lecter. Will has a deep vein of insecurity which runs throughout his whole body. He has had one family ripped from him and he's about to lose another. Maybe if he met your family, he might have a change of heart."

"Why are you aiding me, Mr. Gideon?"

"Because you are the first real man that has crossed the boy's path since this farce began." Abel moved closer. "You don't know much about duals, do you, Mr. Lecter? Their mantra is adapt, evolve, become. Will Graham has changed since he came to the sanctuary, even Will doesn't know what he is capable of. He will need a strong influence to protect and guide him."

"I am not willing to change the terms of my offer."

"The terms and conditions of your offer are already changing. This morning he meant nothing to you and now you like him."

Hannibal ambled outside the stable block in the wake of the Omega and waited as Zeller and Chilton strolled along the paved pathway towards him. Heads cast downwards and with the occasional sweeps of arms, they were totally engrossed in their conversation.

To his right Will had reached the tables, standing near Tier. Will had shaken his head when he was offered a can from the other. With his knowledge of Randall, Hannibal had no doubt the younger Alpha had brought his own alcoholic refreshment with him.

"Good time?" Hannibal inquired as Zeller halted by his side.

Zeller grinned. "I'm back for a second visit and hopefully mother and Alana will join me. It has been fascinating, Doctor Chilton."

The Beta trying his best to look humble, nodded slowly to Zeller, basking in the compliment. "We do our best." With a turn of the head in the direction of the other guests, his demeanour changed. "What on earth.....excuse me gentlemen."

Both Hannibal and Zeller watched as the doctor walked rapidly towards the other visitors. Outwardly nothing seemed changed to Hannibal, the four young men were still seated around the tables and Will was standing near Tier. It took a few moments to register the other man approaching the group. Hannibal turned to his brother, shrugged and the pair followed Chilton.

Chilton's voice was already raised by the time they reached the group. Telling the man to leave in a low stern voice, trying his best to exert his authority, Frederick had already pulled out his phone to contact the guards. The stranger seemed unconcerned. Standing near Will, ignoring Chilton, the intruder seemed absorbed with the Omega. Randall had joined in the debate. Declaring his father was a senator and there would be consequences if the man did not leave, a quiet desperation creeping into his voice. Hannibal waited, observing, only to react when he saw Will edging backwards, finally coming into contact with the table and unable to retreat any further. He walked languidly around the table until he was at the Omega's side.

"I believe you have been requested to leave. I suggest you comply."

The man, an Alpha, tall with neat dark beard and piercing cold blue eyes replied with a flat tone. "And you are?"

"The man who will assist you on your way." Hannibal's voice was smooth and low key, only a quick flex of his hands from open palmed to tight fists conveyed his intentions.

Zeller slowly positioned himself at his brother's side. "I would like to assure you that I am a fully qualified doctor."

The man's gaze broke and it swung towards Zeller. "And I am interested because?"

"Because you will need a doctor after my brother has finished with you."

There was a moment of consideration then the man took one step back and the tension diffused. He addressed Will. "My apologies. I frightened you earlier which was unforgivable and preyed on my conscious. Next time I will go through the proper channels. Until then." With a bow he turned and left.

"Will, inside now." Chilton ordered and the boy scooted around the table towards the doctor. "This session is over."

Zeller and Hannibal made their way to the car park, the verbal inquest conducted by the others into the events held no interest. Hannibal had the key in the lock of the car when he heard his name called and looked back. Will was hurrying down the steps of the sanctuary, Chilton at the top, hands clasped together, with a look of dismay stencilled across his face.

Will stopped a few feet from them. "I don't really know how to thank you. Will I see you again?"

"Are you free tomorrow?"

"Yeah, free most days."

"Then I propose I ride over and you can show me how good a horseman you really are."

"Oh, I'm good, Hannibal. Really good. See you tomorrow." Will called out as he walked backwards towards the steps, with the first genuine smile of the day on his face.

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Chapter 8

"The more I think about it, the more it doesn't feel like a coincidence."

"Then I suggest you stop thinking, Frederick."

"Abel, this serious. Not once but twice an intruder entered the grounds and we still have no idea how he gained entry. It seems too much of a coincidence that it occurred on the very day Hannibal Lecter decided to pay us a visit."

"So you believe that Mr. Lecter orchestrated this incident to achieve what exactly?"

"He did look very impressive dealing with this man. Too good."

"I think you are looking in the right box, Frederick, but in the wrong corner."

"No more metaphors, pleeeeease." Frederick poured himself another coffee. "Hannibal Lecter could have arranged this to impress Will and it appears to have succeeded."

"If I were a betting man, Frederick, I would put my money on Mr. Tier."

"Why would Randall attempt something so foolish when Will and he are quite close."

"Because he is a runt, Frederick."

Chilton spluttered coffee onto his tie. "I beg your pardon."

"Runt, Frederick, of the litter. He has three older brothers who are making a name for themselves in the political arena. Randall is not. In fact, I am at a loss to know exactly what it is that Mr. Tier actually does for a living."

"He has a trust fund, a very lucrative trust fund and is taking instruction with a view to following a career in the arts."

"So he is a rich runt, Frederick."

"I wish you would stop using that word." Frederick took the knife and carefully spread the butter on his toast.

"It is a perfectly acceptable word, Frederick. Been used throughout the ages."

"Well, if you suspect Randall Tier then you can't exclude the Ryan brothers."

"The Ryan brothers are without equal. The produce of their mother's phantom pregnancy."

"If the pregnancy was phantom, then nothing would be produced."

"Exactly, Frederick, they are a collective of nothings. They are the dreams produced after indulging in cheese and chocolate before bedtime. They are the faceless nothings that you believe are slithering under your bed but when you finally pluck up enough courage to look, you find nothing of substance and laugh at your own stupidity for thinking they were actually real."

"My bet would be on Lecter."

"Is it safe to assume that you harbour feelings of dislike towards him, Frederick." Abel picked up his cup and drank the remains of his coffee.

"Hannibal Lecter is a lothario. He has had countless romantic interludes with some of the most beautiful women in high society, none of which appears to last more than a few months and no Omegas. What does that tell you about him?"

"That he is a very lucky man, Frederick."

"Hannibal Lecter is one of the most controlling individuals I have ever met. He appears magnanimous but underneath lurks the desire to exercise power over everyone who crosses his path. Someone like Hannibal Lecter takes no prisoners. Keeps his friends close and his enemies at the bottom of a lake tied to a concrete block."

Abel stood up from the table and smoothed down the front of his coverall. "You are the mother hen who watched her chick hatch from it's egg only now to find the baby bird is leaving the nest and is turning into a beautiful swan. Will sees the monsters who are around us. Hannibal Lecter is not a monster, Frederick, he is the slayer of monsters."

The Lecter household usually kept to an orderly routine. Weekday, breakfast at seven - weekends, breakfast at eight. Normally the dining room was empty by seven thirty on a Monday, but that day had been different. Robert Lecter carefully placed his empty coffee cup back onto it's saucer. Hannibal sat opposite him finishing his coffee while Zeller sat at the far end of the table waiting for his father to speak.

"You didn't say much yesterday, Hannibal, after visiting the Omega boy?"

"I needed time to gather my thoughts."

"Zeller was quite impressed with the boy. It would seem he is quite well educated despite all the difficulties he has faced throughout his young life."

"Will is very intelligent. A little rough around the edges which can easily be smoothed out. He could be an asset to this family."

"And have you made an official offer?"

"I have made a suggestion to the boy which could be mutually advantage."

"Do not play with this boy, Hannibal. In normal circumstances such a marriage would be arranged with the boy's parents but these circumstances are not normal. I would not be pleased if your tactics prevent Valdas from being viewed as a serious candidate."

Hannibal gave a questioning look towards his brother but his father had caught the mood. "Don't blame your brother. He has said nothing about your intentions. He has only taken the opportunity to appraise this boy's suitability. I, for one, do not wish for any harm to fall upon this boy and if any of your tactics hinder his ability to find a suitable match, thus putting him in harm's way, then I shall not be pleased."

"I am returning to the sanctuary today to speak to the boy again. He is looking for someone to protect him and after the incident yesterday, he appears to be looking on me quite favourably. The boy does not really want a mate, rather a family who would adopt him. Much would depend on how well he felt he could fit within this household"

Zeller leant back in his chair and sighed. "He's desperate for a family. Everything Dr. Chilton told me about Will is central to that one point." He shook his head. "Imagine waking up one day and finding your whole family gone. Don't know how I would handle it."

"William would be made very welcome and if he is as pleasing as you say, I am sure we could accommodate his differences." Robert looked straight at Hannibal. "But then, I'm not the one who has the problem with Omegas."

Randall had been at his persuasive best. Will had explained Frederick had gone into Baltimore on an urgent errand as his mother was poorly. Will had never ventured outside of the sanctuary without at least one member of staff present and never without Frederick's permission, but Randall thought he knew which of Will's buttons to push to gain the result he most needed.

With sad eyes, he told Will he understood he wasn't as good looking as Hannibal Lecter, didn't have the same physique as Hannibal Lecter and, of course, hadn't had the full support of his family as had Hannibal Lecter. Randall even compromised his own position as a suitor by listing his many failings, telling Will he accepted with men like Hannibal Lecter as the competition, a more gentle Alpha such as himself, paled into insignificance.

Will finally agreed to the excursion, not so much guilt tripped, Will could always see through manipulation, but as a means to an end. He wanted Randall gone and Hannibal to himself. He viewed Hannibal as something wild contained in a small cage, pacing backwards and forward, testing the bars. Although he tried to keep his empathy in check, there was something about this Alpha which was making it difficult to resist getting into his head.

Randall's Ferrari Spider stood out in the parking area. It was screaming for attention and from the moment Will had softly stroked the paint work with his fingertips there could be no turning back. It would be his first decision as an adult.

"Ten minutes there, a quick look, then back. Frederick hasn't said no."

"He hasn't said no, Randall, because he doesn't know." Will drew his teeth over his bottom lip. "There and back, right?"

It didn't so much roar as purr along the twisting roads. Will had covered this route before, either in Frederick's car or in the sanctuary's antiquated flat bed truck, but there was something exciting almost frightening about this journey. The wind caught his hair and he leaned back into the seat with his eyes closed, He imagined the time when he would own a car as good as this or even buy Hannibal a similar car so the strong Alpha could chauffeur him home.

Randall pulled into the cut away and looked at this watch.

"Nine minutes and twenty seconds exactly." Randall said as they both got out.

Will walked over to the fence. The gradient of the hill gave rise to a spectacular view over the countryside. To the left stood a large derelict farmhouse, adjacent to two smaller ones and further left he could just make out the top of the sanctuary nestling amongst the trees but it was at the centre of the arc to the view that drew his attention. Through the abundance of pines he glimpsed a splash of blue.

"Is that the lake?"

"Yeah," Randall snorted. "Lecter lake it's called around here, well, that's what the Lecters want people around here to call it."

"Randy, don't" Will's voice was edged with disappointment. Initially he had accepted Randall's occasional sniping at the others, but now he was finding the Alpha's approach immature.

Will didn't take much notice when he first heard a car approaching from the downside of the hill but as it pulled up near to the Spider he gave it a cursory look. It was Randall who made the move, holding out an arm towards Will, hand in a stop gesture, he made his way over to the stationary vehicle.

As the driver got out, Will felt apprehension grip deep inside when he recognised the man as the intruder from the previous day. As Randall stood talking to the man, Will climbed two rails of the fence, then as the man pulled back his arm and delivered a punch to Randall's abdomen, Will climbed the rest.

Chapter 9

Will straddled the top of the split rail fence watching the drama unfold, Randall stood slightly hunched clutching his stomach. The man drew him near, by reaching around the back of Randall's neck with his hand, then mouthed something in his ear. For a while there was no movement until Randall scooted around the front of his car and pulled open the driver's side door and drove off at speed.

Will stayed still, not fully comprehending the turn of events, when he saw the man look at him. His face was at first a blank page, but when he slowly smiled, Will reacted. Swinging his leg over the rail, he jumped down onto the grass and turned and ran towards the empty farmhouses. The grass, sodden from the previous night's rain, was slippery and he lost his footing after a few steps. Putting out an arm, his hand touched the ground and in one move he regained his balance and continued to run.

Normally fleet footed, seeing Randall drive off had left a feeling of helplessness which was reflected in his running. The uncertainty of how far the man was behind him and what direction to take clouded his mind. He felt a grip on his trailing arm as his pursuer quickly covered the distance between them. Trying to break free from the grip, Will felt his feet slip from under him and he fell onto the ground. The attacker was on him, holding onto one arm and leaning across his body trying to grab the other. Will, with the palm of his free hand placed against the grass, suddenly pushed upwards and felt the man roll to one side. Will began running, eight paces at most, when the man tackled him. He was falling and the ground came up hard to meet him.

There was no elegance in his attempt to fight off the assailant. Georgia had told him, if you can't punch or kick then it's teeth and claws and Will followed his sister's rules. His hand reached the man's neck and he scratched and the man pulled back. Will twisted his body so his legs were free and with one hand on the man's torso, tried to push him off. A hand grabbed his hair and yanked back. With the other hand holding the waist band of his jeans, he was suddenly pulled into a kneeling position.

"He should've paid the extra, I'll get more for you in the south." Will felt the breath on his face as the Alpha hissed the words into his ear. "Fight and it'll hurt."

Now pulled into standing, Will relaxed enough for the man to loosen his grip. Twisting at the waist, Will swung with his right hand landing a punch on the side of the man's mouth. Momentarily stunned, his attacker lost hold and Will briefly escaped only to be brought to the ground again, but with more force. One hand held behind his back, another gripping his hair, Will was hoisted up and then propelled forward. Head now forced down, it wasn't until the last moment he saw their destination. Almost on top of the galvanized water trough, he saw the murky water and realised his fate.

Legs kicked from under him, the steel edge connected with his ribs and he was pitched head first into the foul smelling liquid. The ice cold water shocked his system and he went still, until panic took hold and his free hand desperately tried to latch onto something while his

feet scrabbled against the wet grass. He was pulled upright and gasped a few breaths before being submerged again. Finding the edge of the trough with his free hand, he pushed back and was rewarded with the man's fist smashing into his hand. Pulled out for a second time, he was thrown to the ground and lay helpless as both hands were forced behind his back and secured with ties.

"Finished?" Will didn't respond instead tried to control the whimpering sound coming from deep in his throat. Forced upright, Will found all the fight had left him and as he was pushed forward, his legs gave way. Face to one side in the mud, he waited for the manhandling to start again, when the Alpha toppled forward.

He watched as the man tried to stand when a heavy boot came down on the Alpha's thigh, again and again. From his view point, Will could see the back of the second figure as he lifted his leg and brought the full force of his boot onto the attacker's knee. The scream came after the sound of the crack, both of which tore through Will. The second figure turned his attention to Will, one arm around his waist, another on his arm he was lifted into standing position.

"Move." He was turned and meekly allowed himself to be guided to where a large grey horse stood patiently. Eyes downcast and the whimpering going into overdrive, Will's submissive side was gaining control. With a hand placed under his jawline, his chin was tilted upwards.

"Will, can you stay strong." Will saw the brown eyes staring back at him, and in one glance took in the whole visage. His knees buckled but Hannibal kept him upright.

"Can you ride, Will, I am unarmed and the sooner we leave the better." Will managed a small nod, his eyes still locked onto the brown eyes. Hannibal in one quick movement pulled out a small knife, cut through the ties tethering the wrists together then lifted Will and placed him on the animal's back. Will shifted into a suitable position then Hannibal's foot found the stirrup and he mounted the horse.

With his back against the Alpha and an arm snaked around his waist, Will finally felt safe.

Chapter 10

Neither engaged in conversation throughout the ride, the trail path was straight and only once did Hannibal speak, to advise him to lean forward as they approached a low hanging branch. It didn't seem much time had elapsed before they reached an iron gate and with ease Hannibal got off the horse and pulled the gate open, leading the horse and Will through the opening. As the trail disappeared he noticed the grass underneath the horse's hooves as they rode across a lawn in front of a large imposing house.

Will gave the outside a cursory look but mostly kept his head down. Hannibal halted the horse near the entrance to the sun room and dismounting in one swing of his leg, helped the boy down and when satisfied Will was capable of supporting his own weight, guided him into the building and sat him down in a wicker chair. Will saw the woman standing by a door. She was petite, yellow hair touching her shoulders, her blue eyes giving them a searching look.

Bedelia looked at the boy sitting slightly hunched over. His hair was west and she could see strands of grass and clumps of dirt caked into his curls.

"What happened?" She asked

"He was attacked." Hannibal reached inside his jacket. "I will call the police and ...."

"Please don't." There was a plea in Will's voice.

"The man who attacked you is dangerous." Hannibal's voice was low

"I, ... er... I just need Frederick."

"This is Will Graham, mother. I need to contact Frederick Chilton."

"I have his number." Bedelia entered the house with Hannibal following. Will anxiously looked around, unsettled he was on his own when Bedelia returned. "He's making the call. Are you cold?"

Will nodded his head, finding it difficult to speak, realising the sore throat which was coming upon him fast was most likely caused by the perpetual whimpering noises he had been making. Trying to stop had been harder than he thought and between periodically trying to swallow to halt the process and now trying to stop his bottom lip from quivering which was a precursor to full blown crying, he was making a hash of both.

"You are safe, Will, everything will be alright."

He looked into her bright blue eyes, eyes full of concern.

"It's okay, I'm not going to cry." Will said, mentally kicking himself as his weaker side, which he had always despised, rapidly took over and tears began to roll down his cheeks.

"I don't mind if you do." Her voice was soft, reminding Will of the soothing tone his mother had always used whenever he had scraped a knee or bumped his head. Hannibal appeared at her side holding out a car rug which Bedelia placed gently around his shoulders.

"I think sweet strong tea." She addressed her son who nodded and headed off again. Will watched as Hannibal left, his eyes followed his departure and an awkwardness crept over him.

"It's the second time he's saved me." Will said as Bedelia sat down next to him and placed a comforting arm around his shoulders.

Frederick received the call as he pulled into the sanctuary grounds and drove straight out again. His brain locked into automatic mode as he drove along at speed, inwardly cursing every bend he had to negotiate and every rabbit which crossed his path. Finally cursing aloud at the planning committee for failing to agree the commencement date for the new road which would have shaved ten minutes off his journey. By the time he had arrived at the Lecter's home his anger had reached boiling point. Shown in by Bedelia, he was momentarily taken back by the dishevelled Omega but soon went into overdrive.

Chilton was almost apoplectic, alternating between chastising Will over and over again for leaving the safety of the sanctuary and ranting over the thought of a stranger freely roaming the countryside, waiting to strike against the Omega. Will knew better than to interrupt and kept his head low, once the initial anger subsided Frederick began to fuss over the boy and Will gave him an edited version of the morning's attack.

Will could see the cogs of Frederick's brain begin to whirr into motion.

"It was lucky you were on hand, Mr. Lecter." He said glaring at Hannibal.

"I left earlier than anticipated, fortunately for Will."

"It's rather curious you just happened to be passing that particular spot the exact time the incident occurred." Frederick was less than subtle.

"I did not have a hand in this." There was an edge to Hannibal's voice and although a passive bystander during the conversation, Will knew he had to speak.

"Frederick, Hannibal didn't arrange it." His voice was hoarse.

Frederick tilted his head to one side looking down at Will sitting in the chair. "I suppose it could be a coincidence all this occurred after Mr. Lecter arrived on the courtship scene."

"Call Randall, you will go to voice mail. Leave a message telling him you are contacting the Baltimore police department and the FBI because you are concerned for his safety. Tell him you've already left a message for his father. Randall will call you back explaining why he ran away. He will try to make it seem plausible but he will be lying."

"Surely, not Randall Tier." Frederick wailed.

"Please Frederick, just make the call."

Will watched as Frederick made his way outside, pacing back and forth whilst talking.

"You believe Randall is involved somehow?" Hannibal asked

Will shrugged. "I told him he was too pedestrian for me then mentioned your brother. Guess he wanted to play the hero but it went wrong, actively wrong. If I'm right he'll call back 'cause he won't want a scandal."

"If he did arrange the attack, then he is fortunate he is not facing some very serious charges. If you had not fended off your attacker quite so well, things could have ended very badly for you. For the short time I observed, you put up an impressive fight for an Omega."

"Sometimes you're given two choices, you have to give it up or give it all you've got. Guess I wasn't looking forward to another ride around the countryside tied up in a trunk of a car." Will saw the way Hannibal looked at him, waiting for Will to elaborate on his statement and decided to divert the conversation. "Thanks for saving me. I don't know how I can ever repay you."

"You do not owe me, Will. I am just glad that you are safe."

They were all observing Frederick walking back and forth on the lawn, phone to his ear, waving an arm in the air as if conducting an invisible orchestra. Will could tell by the sheepish look on Frederick's face as he returned that he had been right about Randall. Will didn't need the confirmation. His mind had gone over the events of the last two days, everything had slotted into place from the time he had tried to let Randall down gently until the time of the attack, to the words the attacker had used. The dots joined together behind his eyes as he closed them and the whole scenario played out as a waking nightmare.

"According to Mr. Tier he was in such agony after being assaulted, he decided to drive off and get help. Apparently he didn't think to just take out his phone and dial nine one one. At some point he had to pull over to the side of the road where he passed out. He said his mind went blank due to pain and shock. As if it wasn't already blank before today."

Although Frederick's voice was relatively calm, Will sensed the cold anger flowing through the Beta. Frederick was never one for direct confrontation, usually first to walk away, but he knew which ears to whisper into, knew how to cause maximum damage to his enemies by ruining their reputations. Will suspected he would have to spend considerable time calming Frederick to stop him going after Randall.

Will looked straight at Frederick. "Hannibal said whoever I married is going to be a stranger and he is right. So I might as well pick one out of the hat and get it over. I can't risk being kidnapped, can't go through that again."

"We will discuss this tomorrow when things have settled down." Frederick was back to his calm fatherly voice.

"No, I want you to contact Ingram. He agreed to most of my terms and he wants very little in return."

"Except to whisk you away to California."

"We can work something out."

Frederick walked over to Will and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Don't rush into anything, Will. A couple of days of relaxation and meditation will help you get everything into perspective."

"Frederick, I can't do this anymore." Will hesitated for a moment aware of the others, then whispered. "It's degrading. I just want to go home and make the arrangements. Ingram will do. I don't feel safe anymore."

Frederick let out a long sigh. "I know, Will, I know." He spoke like a parent trying to placate a small child. "Will, I'm sorry but we have a problem. My mother is poorly and I'm going to take her to my sister's home. I can't leave you at the sanctuary, we only have temporary guards and Abel is on leave. The last thing you need is a day out with my mother but I won't make it back until the early hours of the morning, so I'm afraid we will have to get you cleaned up and you will have to come with us. We can discuss this tomorrow, look at it through fresh eyes."

"He could stay here. He would be perfectly safe." Although Bedelia's voice was light, it commanded respect.

"We couldn't possibly impose on you."

Dr. Chilton." Bedelia was standing with arms crossed over her midriff and head held high. "I give you my word that no harm will come to this young man under my care. You can collect him tomorrow morning, I will watch over him and I will guarantee his safety."

"Will?" Frederick sounded hesitant.

Will glanced at Bedelia and felt himself being pulled in a way he didn't understand. "I'd like to stay."

"I've brought a change of clothes because you said his were dirty, but I don't have any toothbrushes or....."

"Dr. Chilton, we can provide everything he will need. It's just for one night and he will be under the same roof as a psychologist and two qualified doctors. I am certain Hannibal is capable of dealing with outsiders should a situation arise, which it will not."

Frederick looked Hannibal up and down and then turned to Bedelia. "I am certain he is more than capable. I wouldn't like to be on the receiving end of his anger."

"You should've seen what he did to that guy's knee. I heard it crack." Will piped up.

Frederick winced. "Will, are you quite sure you want to stay?"

Will managed to flash Frederick one of his brilliant smiles in response, attempting to appease the Beta.

"Very well, if you could see me to my car." Frederick widened his eyes at Hannibal and nodded his head towards the other room.

Hannibal managed to keep the smile in check, understanding Frederick's attempt at non-verbal communication. "I will see Dr. Chilton to the door and get your clothes." Hannibal said as he left the room with Frederick in tow.

"And I will get you some fresh towels and wash products. Omegan brand of course." Bedelia followed the others to the hall.

"You wanted my attention, Dr. Chilton." Hannibal stood with his back straight towering over the Beta.

Frederick spoke quickly looking back towards the sun room, where Will sat.

"I understand you made Will a proposal which he did not accept. I am asking you to refine your offer and ask him again. I am sure with a little bit of give on your part, Will's answer will be in the affirmative."

"You have given the impression you do not care for my advances." Hannibal's voice hinted at amusement.

"I don't, well didn't, although Mr. Gideon speaks highly of you and I respect Abel's opinion. The guardianship, well, ecstatic does not even come close to their response. The Lecters are the preferred candidates, which one they don't care."

"What has prompted this urgency on your part?" Hannibal gave Frederick a smile.

"Clark Ingram should have never been considered as a candidate. How he got through the vetting process I do not know. With Mr. Ingram you get the triumvirate, charm, focus and ruthlessness, the charm being debatable. I've heard things about him, which believe you me I wished I hadn't, they stay with you. I consider Clark Ingram to be a dangerous man but if I try to persuade Will, yet again, to reject a suitor, I believe he will dig his heels in and accept the offer. You heard what he said, he doesn't feel safe and that makes Will vulnerable. I shouldn't say this but if you want more than the land, things that may enhance your status as an architect, then ask Will about some of the companies he owns. You may be surprised how advantageous marrying Will really is."

"You sound desperate."

"No, Mr. Lecter, I sound afraid. Afraid for Will. I may not like you as a person but I know your parents are honourable people and they will keep Will safe." Frederick turned his attention to Bedelia. "Will needs people around him that he can trust and love and I believe he will find what he needs here. You have an opportunity, don't waste it."

Will watched as Frederick drove away and gave a small sigh as a slight feeling of nervousness overcame him. Bedelia's hand touched his arm.

"You will be fine, you are perfectly safe, Will."

Will felt himself slowly being drawn to her. "Guess this will be like the sleep overs I had as a kid." He felt a small surge of happiness when Bedelia gave out a little laugh at his remark.

He was ushered along the dark hallway past the main staircase to a secondary staircase near the end of the house. With Hannibal on one side and Bedelia on the other, they walked at a leisurely pace with Bedelia explaining to Will he would be sleeping in the room next to Hannibal. The wooden flooring felt cold on Will's bare feet, he had insisted he took off his muddy shoes before entering the main house only to find his fingers fumbling with the laces as he tried to untie them. Hannibal had knelt down and loosened the double bows he always used and slowly slipped the trainers off the Omega's feet. Will found himself mesmerised by the Alpha, taking note of the colour of his hair, dark blond with a few golden strands, inhaling deeply his scent of cedar and musk.

Hannibal led the way up the stairs turning into another shorter hallway, stopping at the second door on the right. Walking into the bedroom, Will was surprised how bright the room was after the darker hallways, the light cascading through a large window, a bed placed directly in front of it, the headboard resting just below the sill. A large cherry wood armoire was set against the wall on his left, adjacent to another door.

"My room is through the door." Hannibal placed Will's clean clothing onto the bed. "I will stay in there until you have finished. Shout if you need anything."

Bedelia headed to the right of the room and opened another door which lead into a small bathroom. "The shower can be tricky so I will get the water started."

Will followed Bedelia and looked into the small bathroom, the shower, toilet and a wash basin were placed perfectly to give an illusion of space in a room which had very little, the white wall and mirror tiles enhanced the feeling. The sporadic splashes of blue in the flooring brought a nod of approval from Will.

"Omegan colours." Will said out loud. He saw Bedelia waiting for him to expand his comment. "Omegas like their bathrooms white or cream with blue accessories. The theory goes it is a genetic memory, the earliest traces of Omegan history were predominantly found near coastal areas. The blue skies with white clouds, the blue sea tipped with white foam. We lean towards those colours."

"You have an interest in history, Will."

"Omegan history. The past shapes us."

Will was grateful to be standing under the warm spray from the shower. Bedelia had shown him how to operate the latch to lock the bathroom door, warning him it was temperamental

and he would be perfectly safe if he left It unlocked, but Will hadn't felt comfortable with the thought of being naked with an Alpha within scenting range. He washed thoroughly with the Omegan products, pleasantly surprised by the fresh linen smell. He paid particular attention to his groin, the only place he displayed body hair, knowing how prone he was to sweating, afraid the others might smell him and the reaction it might promote.

He poured a liberal amount of product in his cupped hand, gently stroking his sensitive area. His mind wandered back to the attack and how the man had grabbed him and wrestled him to the ground and wondered how he would have reacted if the attacker had been Hannibal. He imagined Hannibal pulling him into the empty farm house, throwing him on the floor, straddling him and ripping off his clothes. Satisfied with the feeling pulsing through him, Will envisaged the clean stables of the sanctuary where Hannibal had pushed him against the wall, only this time there was no Abel to save him.

This time he didn't just imagine Hannibal passionately kissing him, but could almost flavour the Alpha's tongue as it was forced into his mouth, hear the button of his jeans being popped, his skin feeling the roughness of the clothing as it was yanked downwards. With his breathing becoming laboured, he imagined Hannibal's hand slowly moving up his thigh, finding the edge of his boxers and slowly working inwards, fingers gliding through his soft pubic hair. With the water running down his back, Will's hand followed the path of his imagination until he heard the soft moans coming from his mouth and felt his cock rising to half mast.

Pulled back into reality he quickly finished showering and vigorously dried himself on the towels. Wrapping a towel around his waist, he walked into the bedroom and hurriedly put on the clean clothes. He was aware his heart rate had increased, reacting to his fantasies and was conscious of a change in him. His senses sharpening, he turned his head towards the door connecting the two bedrooms and as he breathed in the aroma of cedar, he sensed the awakening of a wantonness he was now both desperate to indulge and desperate to flee.

Chapter 11

President Donald Sutcliffe is unlike any other politician because he isn't one. The former Chief Surgeon at the Omegan General in Baltimore decided to enter the presidential race at the last moment. Sneered at by critics over his lack of political experience (he was called Mr. Opportunity because of his campaign slogans - seize the opportunity, opportunity knocks) his landslide victory silenced them. The Sutcliffe family motto is "persuasion not coercion" and Donald Sutcliffe and his persuasive charm was a huge hit with the voters across all dynamics.

The son of former president, Aaron Sutcliffe, and the beautiful socialite, Alana Du Maurier, Donald was only two years old when his mother died in a tragic car accident. His father's second marriage three years later to Kade Prurnell created history when she became the First Lady - the only Omega to hold that title. Donald has said of his step mother who he always refers to as his Omega mother.

"She is without doubt one of the biggest influences in my life. She has an inner strength which is neither domineering or aggressive. She also has a quirky sense of humour which I bought into from a very early age"

No stranger to tragedy, Donald married Cassandra Boyle but five years after the birth of their son, Nicholas, both mother and child died when the Omegan influenza virus struck the east coast. He was quoted as saying. "For months after their deaths, every time a door opened, I expected to see them walk into the room and when they didn't my heart sank." When asked why he never re-married he said. "We were officially bonded one month after our wedding but in reality my heart bonded from the first time I saw her. I guess I'm an example of the old saying - only bonds defy death."

Donald describes his sister, Bedelia and her husband, Robert Lecter as his closest friends. He says of them. "They have been happily married for over thirty years and even today they are still a couple of love birds."

Remembering his reaction to being voted one of the ten sexiest men alive. "I couldn't shave for a week, as every time I looked in the mirror, I would laugh. My nephews still joke about it."

FREDDIE LOUNDS

TATTLE.SOCIETY

Will stood at the door for several moments before knocking and calling out. "I've finished."

He felt like a schoolboy waiting to see the principal and he stepped back when he heard movement. Hannibal opened the door and handed him the trainers.

"They've been cleaned." Will said surprised

"Mostly I like to be productive and you took your time to shower, Will."

Will instinctively ducked his head. "I'm sorry, I didn't know the time, I....."

"Hey." Hannibal placed a hand on the boy's shoulder. "I was not being critical. I know Omegas like the pampering.

Will blushed a little wondering if pampering was a Lithuanian euphemism for masturbating in the shower.

"Are you hungry?"

"A little."

"Good" said Hannibal "I will fix you something very special for lunch. But first your shoes."

It didn't take Will long to slip his feet in them, quickly tying the laces and was soon following Hannibal down the small staircase.

"This part of the house was built much later. Whoever designed and built it was in a hurry, it leaves much to be desired." Hannibal said without much enthusiasm.

Will looked at the large oval shaped window which overshadowed the stairs.

"They realised too late they had not enough windows so the few they could alter they did. Hence this large monstrosity."

"I suppose it lets the maximum light in." Said Will trying to sound knowledgeable.

"Yes and maximum draughts. This is a very cold house, Will, which needs a radical overhaul. The Du Mauriers were not particularly well known for the artistry. They paid others to design and build with very little input from themselves. A home should have some emotional representation of the people who live in it, otherwise it is just bricks and mortar."

"So how would you improve it?" Will began to realise how much he liked listening to Hannibal's voice, his accent making even the most mundane of words seem silky.

"Rip it down and start again."

"No salvage attempt?"

"I do not waste time on lost causes nor can I resurrect the dead. Come on, lunch." Hannibal placed a hand on Will's shoulder and steered him in the direction of the kitchen.

Will stood for several moments speechless as he looked around the room eventually managing a "Wow" as he stood looking at the brightest kitchen he had ever seen with the white wood cabinets and yellow walls everything made him think of summer.

"I remodelled it myself." said Hannibal in a matter of fact manner. "We had a small fire in the kitchen so my mother decided it was time for a complete change."

"I have sometimes wondered if Hannibal was responsible for the fire." Bedelia sat at the kitchen island drinking her coffee.

"Even I would not go that far." Hannibal walked over to the coffee machine. "Would you like coffee, Will, it is fresh?"

"Yeah, that'll be great. Milk no sugar." Will was now taking in the ceiling and lighting.

"I chose the wall colour to specifically match the colour of my mother's hair in an attempt to flatter her into allowing me remodel the rest of this folly."

"Hannibal does not approve of the choices made by my mother's family."

"What would you like to eat, Will?" asked Hannibal

"Something light, cheese or eggs, a sandwich will be fine."

Will sat at the island next to Bedelia where Hannibal had placed the coffee cup. With quick glances towards the Alpha, Will found himself enraptured by the graceful masculinity of the man. Bedelia engaged Will in conversation asking general questions about his likes and dislikes, moving on to his education. He had warmed to her, usually stuttering when talking to strangers, she had put him at ease. He recounted his studies, his fascination with Omegan history and the difficulty in obtaining unbiased literature. He found himself accepting her suggestion he should talk to her husband who possessed several books on the subject. Knife and fork placed either side of the plate in front of him, Will leaned forward to smell the aroma of the cheese still bubbling on top of the toast.

"Next time I will cook you something more adventurous." Hannibal announced.

Situated at the end of the hallway Hannibal's office was exactly as expected. A large dual aspect room with a desk centrally placed opposite the door, silver filing cabinets to one side.

"You work from home?"

"I share my time between here and Baltimore. Living so close to the office is not ideal. I like to cleanse my thoughts at times and constant interruptions from work colleagues or well meaning friends is not always conducive to creativity. My family know well enough when to leave me alone."

"It's quiet here, peaceful."

"Have you thought any more of my offer?" Hannibal was standing directly in front of him, looking down with his head tilted to one side, making he seem almost playful.

The words caught Will by surprise. "I want a marriage not a business partnership."

"And if I were to make certain changes?"

Will looked long and hard at the face. The aquiline nose and full lips were attractive but it was the rich brown almond shaped eyes which had him enthralled. "If I like the changes, then maybe a yes."

"Are you playing me, Will?" I do not recall Ingram being mentioned as a suitor."

"I'm not playing anyone." Will sounded a little indignant. "If I were to play you, I would tell Frederick to accept any offer Valdas might make."

Hannibal smiled at the sound of defiance. "But you would accept Ingram?"

"I don't know, I feel like I've fallen overboard and I'm clutching at anything that'll keep me afloat. If Randy hadn't been so stupid. I don't know who to trust anymore. This has left me confused..." Will lowered his head " and afraid."

As Hannibal walked towards his desk, Will took a long look at the man.

"Hannibal." The Alpha turned to face Will. "I do trust you. It could've been anyone being attacked and you still would have tried to help. I know you acted for the right reasons, not to impress."

"Good." Hannibal replied. "You cannot have a relationship without complete trust.

Will let himself be led around the office, Hannibal showing him the plans for the new Baltimore, explaining how the fire which raged through the city thirteen years earlier had destroyed the entire Omega sector. Clarifying the difficulties surrounding the rebuilding of that part of the city due to the endless delays over ownership rights and the protests by Omegas over their lack of representatives on key committees. Hannibal was impressed by Will's understanding of the events over a decade earlier and found conversing easy.

"Business studies." Will said as a way of explaining his knowledge. "The guardianship insisted I had to take them because a fool and his money are soon parted, not that I was any good at them. The Graham side were originally Alpha and they made money prospecting gold around the eighteen hundreds, first in North Carolina then in Georgia. Made even more in eighteen hundred and forty eight during the California gold rush. When the guardianship took over the running of the Graham estate they diversified into oil, land, railways and steel. Nowadays it's technology and renewable energy, out with the old in with the new, except oil of course."

"You have an interest in the Baltimore project?"

"Yeah, a couple of the companies involved, Winstonian Estates and Phoenix Wings, are technically mine, well once I marry, will be mine. Not that I intend to get involved with their running. Guess I let the guardianship carry on. All my companies carry Winston Graham's name in some way or another, he was my grandpa many times back. Do you know anything about these companies, Hannibal?" Will smiled sweetly.

The rest of the day went quickly, with Alana arriving home first and after an introduction, Will found himself answering the same questions Bedelia had asked earlier in the day. Unconsciously he had rubbed his hands against his arms as the chill of the evening had set in. Hannibal seeing the action, had produced a sweater for Will to wear, explaining that an elderly Lithuanian aunt regularly sent them to him for his birthday but they were always too small. Zeller arrived, giving Will a friendly wave soon followed by Robert. When Robert offered his hand, Will smoothed his hand against his jeans before accepting it, hoping to wipe away any sweat as nervousness set in.

Seated next to Hannibal in the dining room, Will began to relax as the Lecters began passing snippets of information about their respective days to each other. Robert had poured the wine, filling Will's glass with the words "*Drink, relax, enjoy.*" and after one or two sips, he felt himself unwind.

The housekeeper placed the dish in front of him with care, the trout on one side of the plate, the vegetables the other and he waited till she had finished around the table before picking up his knife and fork. He took small bites, as his mother had taught him, in case someone spoke to him and was relieved when Alana and Zeller began an in depth conversation leaving the others to their food. He was halfway through the meal when the housekeeper returned and whispered something to Zeller who made his excuses and left, only to return several moments later with a distraught looking Randall.

"Sorry, Will, he insisted." said Zeller returning to his chair.

Randall shifted from one foot to the other before speaking. "Will, I just had to apologise and ask your forgiveness."

Will was speechless, aware of the eyes in the room were on him, waiting for his response. "How did you know I was here?"

"One of the guards at the sanctuary. I drove there because Chilton said I couldn't see you anymore."

"Okay, you apologised, I accept your apology, so please, Randy, just go."

Randall looked at Hannibal then back at Will. "Why are you here, Will, is it because of him? Are you sleeping with him? Is he what you want, is that what's this is all about?" Randall waved his hand towards the dinner table.

Will felt his face turn red. "He saved me, Randy, that's why I'm here, the rest is in your head."

"No, you wanted this, a chance to get close, get close to him. I could tell by the way you looked at him."

Will snapped, his voice full of anger. "You set me up, wanting to play the hero. That guy had his own agenda and you were too stupid to see it. He could have killed me or worse. I trusted you, I needed to trust you but I don't anymore."

There was a moments silence around the room before Bedelia spoke. "I think it would be in everyone's interest if you leave, Randall."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Lecter, I really am. I didn't mean to intrude." Randall looked back at Will, his voice breaking with emotion as Will's words sank in. "I'm sorry about everything, I was stupid. I didn't mean for you to get hurt."

"Look, everything is fine, I'm fine. I just want to forget about it, okay."

"But, Chilton said you've chosen Ingram, is it a kind of rebound thing?"

"There's no rebound thing, Randy, cause there was never an us. I like you, I just don't like you in that way." Will tried to keep his voice even keeled. "It's okay, Randy, I don't hate you or anything. I do understand. I should've told you earlier, so in a way, it's just as much my fault as it's yours. Maybe we can just be friends."

"If you gave me a second chance, Will, things would be different, I could be different."

"I'm not asking you to change, Randy. You can't be something you're not and I wouldn't want you to try and change because of me. It wouldn't be fair."

"Will, I'm sorry, I'll try and put it right but don't marry Ingram. You don't know what he's like. My father said he's under investigation."

Will felt the anger rising again. "Don't, Randall. You've done this before, lying about the others. I don't want to hear it."

"Will, he's under investigation for Omega abuse. He's violent. If you don't believe me then talk to my father. Clark Ingram has escaped prosecution twice because he lawyered up."

"Shut up, Randall."

"Don't be an idiot, Will. He's known in all the molly houses in the south. He's suspected of rape."

Will pushed back from the table and stood, glaring at Randall. "Idiot, you call me an idiot. You're the one who nearly got me kidnapped. You're stupid, Randall and there's one thing I learned, there's no fixin' stupid."

"Randall, please." Robert could feel the situation getting out of hand. "This is neither the time or the place for such a discussion. You have apologised to William and he has forgiven you, so I would appreciate it if you were to leave as I would like to finish dining in peace."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lecter. Please contact my father, you know him, Mr. Lecter, he wouldn't lie. Please, for Will's sake."

Robert tipped his head forward in acknowledgment of the request.

"Thank you, sir." As Randall turned to leave, he looked back at Will "Goodbye Will."

"I'll see you out." Zeller got out of his chair and led Randall from the room.

"Goodbye, Randy." Will said under his breath. When the door closed, Will sat down in his chair and looked at Robert. "I'm sorry, sir, I had no idea he would come looking for me."

"It's not your fault, William. Young Mr. Tier has only realised the dreadful mistake he has made. I think you have made your position quite clear and I am impressed with your willingness to forgive him. However, if there is some substance in his accusations against Mr Ingram, I could make some inquiries to find out the truth."

A look of doubt began to appear on Will's face. "You think he could be telling the truth?"

Robert smiled warmly. "I would be more than happy to look into this matter. We don't want you ending up in the wrong hands, do we."

"I'd appreciate that, sir."

"Father, what did he mean by molly houses. I don't think I've heard that expression before." Alana asked as Zeller returned to his chair.

Robert took in a breath and looked at Will. "Have you heard of this expression?"

"Yeah, it's common in the south." Will kept eye contact with Robert.

"If I explained, it wouldn't upset you. One of the burdens living in a household full of medical professionals, they know no boundaries."

"No, I'm fine." Will said, finally ducking his head.

Robert looked at Alana. "It was a term originally used in the eighteen hundreds to describe a meeting house where men sought the company of other men for the purpose of love. However, today it would be used to describe a brothel where young Omega boys would be kept. By young, I mean underage."

Alana let out a gasp. "Will, how well do you know this Ingram?"

"I've met him twice, he seems very charming. The guardians wouldn't have let him near me if they suspected anything."

"You've met him just twice and you are thinking of marrying him." Alana couldn't disguise the disgust in her voice.

"I just don't have time for a long courtship. I can't return south, it would be much worse, always looking over my shoulder." Will appeared to scramble to find positive things to say. "Clark inherited his father's shipping company and is very rich. He's not asking for much. He seemed genuine. He lives in California where he produces films. It's a hobby." Will shook his head and grinned. "He even suggested that I could do some modelling for him."

"So if you marry him you will have to live in California, away from all your friends in Baltimore. You would be isolated, Will." Alana threw her father a pointed look.

"That's why I turned him down. I suggested we buy a house in Baltimore and we could split our time between the two states. He does go away on business quite a lot."

"Good luck with that, houses are very scarce in Baltimore, anything decent impossible." Zeller remarked.

"Yeah, that's what Clark said, said that I hadn't thought it through. But Hannibal has solved the problem." Will looked at the Alpha sitting by his side giving him a wide smile. " I own Winstonian Estates and they own lots of properties in Baltimore so I guess the housing problem is over." Will returned to his dinner pushing the last of his fish on to his fork unaware of the look passing between Hannibal and his father.

"Will is a student of Omegan history." Bedelia decided to try to change the mood feeling an awkwardness pervading the room. "He has a fascination with the European dynamics."

"It's very difficult to understand the relationship Omegas have with other dynamics. It's hard to separate the fact from the fiction." Will sensed Bedelia's discomfort so forced himself to initiate the conversation.

Robert gave a nod of approval. "Much of the fiction including folklore has been inspired by fact. In most eastern European countries, Omegan society has been somewhat closed off to outsiders. In fact, it has always been considered a great honour for an Alpha to be allowed to marry into an Omega family."

"That's what I don't understand. Most historians would have us believe it was normal practice for an Alpha male to marry an Alpha female, usually one of the same rank or higher, then after the usual one or two children, the Alpha male would take a second, or even a third Omega and have as many children as possible."

"Most published historians are not Omegas. Omegas are the universal donors, they are the only ones who can pair with any of the three dynamics and produce the same breed as the sire or their own. There is no standard practice, no rules which every dynamic has to obey. For instance in this country, polite society considered it unseemly for an Alpha female to have more than two children, unless of course they were of such a high social standing. Then it would have been deemed necessary for them to spread their pure bloodline amongst the lower orders. In Lithuania, it is common for all dynamics to have large families. If you were trace back the Lecter line throughout recorded history it consists entirely of Alpha Alpha matings, hence we are recognised as thoroughbreds. You, yourself, are considered pure Omega but at one point the Graham line was Alpha." Robert enthused, glad to discuss a subject within his area of expertise.

"You can only be considered pure if you can trace back five generations of Omega Omega pairings. Winston Graham was the last Alpha sire and he would have been my....." Will paused as he motioned his hand as if it were climbing invisible stairs. " fifth great grandfather so that would mean I have seven generations of Omega Omega pairings before contam...." Will stopped and looked down, embarrassment written all over his face.

Robert leaned back in his chair and laughed. "It's perfectly acceptable to say the word, young man. Do you know what I adore about Omegas, William? They can be the biggest snobs when talking about the purity of the dynamics. An Alpha would never consider their line was contaminated by an Alpha Omega pairing but Omegas would."

"I'm sorry, it was a slip of the tongue. It's just, if I travelled back in time and met my ancestors, I would have to be subservient to all the Alpha Grahams."

"If I were able to travel back in time, I would also have to be subservient as the original Lecters were part of the nobility and held the title Count." Robert grinned.

Will countered. "Well, if we're talking titles, then on my mother's side the Cassinis are descended from Omega royalty, so I'm entitled to call myself Prince William."

Robert let out a laugh. "You proved my point, William. Omegas are terrible snobs, you just had to out do me. So when you marry what title would your husband hold?"

Will gave a quick sideways glance towards Hannibal then looked back to Robert. "I suppose princess."

Robert continued the banter. "I wouldn't say he looks much like a princess."

"If he wore a pink dress and a tiara he could pass." Will gave an impish grin and Bedelia, who had caught up with game, enjoyed watching her husband display a side of himself that was too often hidden.

Hannibal who had seemed more interested in eating his dinner than following the debate, looked studiously at Will then to his father. "I hope you are not talking about someone in this room."

"Of course not, my son. Though I often thought pink would suit you." Robert laughed out loud as Will snorted trying to suppress his own laughter by placing a hand across his mouth. It took a few moments for them to gain control when Robert leaned forward and gently tapped Will's hand which was placed on the table.

"You are a remarkable boy, young William. I hope I can make you delay your choice of a husband for a few days until you have met all the members of my family."

Will smiled as he nodded in agreement. "I hope so, too."

Will spent the rest of the night in the sitting room, first looking through a family photograph album with Bedelia, then reading a book Robert had recommended. Robert and Hannibal sat

quietly engrossed in a documentary about railway journeys across Europe, then later Zeller casually threw questions in Will's direction about the aims of the sanctuary. Eventually, tiredness and the events of the day took hold and after a cup of warm milk, Will made his excuses and went to bed.

Hannibal escorted him to the bedroom, making sure the Omega had enough blankets on his bed. When Will requested he be allowed to leave the bathroom light on, ashamedly confessing to Hannibal he was afraid of the dark, Hannibal had been sympathetic, even suggesting that the connecting door between the bedrooms should be left ajar. Once he was satisfied Will was ready to settle for the night, he left the Omega to his own devices.

Robert was in his usual chair, a small glass of port in one hand, by the time Hannibal had returned to the sitting room. Hannibal walked over the drinks cabinet and took out a brandy glass and poured himself a small measure of his father's finest. He sat down in one of the easy chairs looking in the direction of his father.

"You won him over with your charm."

Robert glanced at Hannibal without moving position. "It was not an act, I like the boy. He's intelligent, personable and eager to please. With the right handling and encouragement he will make a perfect mate and will find his own place in society, maybe even a historian, he certainly appears to show interest. I can see no problem if William became part of this family should he marry Valdas."

"But you see a problem if he should marry me."

"He needs a gentle hand. A little piece of bravado showed when he handled Randall Tier, but underneath, he needs to be cosseted. William may be stronger than most Omegas but he will always need love and affection. I've seen Omegas who have wilted and emotionally died on the vine because they have chosen someone who is incapable of loving them fully. I am very much afraid your kind of love would cause irreparable harm to this young Omega."

"You make me out to be a monster."

"I am immensely proud of you, Hannibal and I love you. You are without equal. You seem to sail through life with such ease that people want to be within your presence and unknowingly, you pull them into your orbit. But control is your god. Inside you lurks something you believe is dangerous, something you must keep a tight hold on. It is as if you cannot let this genii out of it's bottle, not because it would not return, but because you, yourself, would prevent it from returning."

Hannibal tasted his brandy. "Will is attracted to me, he is not very good at hiding it, even though he tries. If I amend my offer, he would accept. You, however, would prefer to champion this Omega rather than gain the land and the companies."

Robert sipped the port then cupped his free hand around the glass as if protecting it's contents. "You have a pattern. You are only prepared to participate in a relationship with those you consider to be your equal. People of the same ilk, who can walk away without one backward glance. If you enter into a relationship with this Omega, you will destroy him, as

you would expect the same emotionless response from him as you have had with the others. He is incapable of such behaviour. William will give you his heart and you will ignore the gift, not by accident, but deliberately which will be far more cruel. He could not undergo such treatment and remain the same."

Robert finished the port and placed the empty glass on the table. "I have spoken to Harland Tier. It would seem there is an investigation into Ingram at the highest level. He apparently likes his Omegas young and compliant. Once he gets bored with them, he shares them with his friends or people with a similar predilection. Ingram's last long term relationship ended when his boyfriend was beaten to a pulp. I will speak to young William in the morning and advise him accordingly. That young man does seem to attract the monsters."

Hannibal finished his drink and stood up. "I have not given up on Will but am happy to evaluate your words and make adjustments. I agree I would have to give Will special consideration and I will look into myself to see if I can adapt sufficiently to make him happy."

Robert spoke again. "Did you tell Will you were considering amending your offer?"

"Yes."

"And he responded how?"

"Any amendments would have to include children. He wants a marriage not a business partnership."

"And if the amendments were made, would he accept your offer?"

"I believe so."

Robert leaned back. "In one evening both you and Randall Tier have expressed a willingness to adjust your personalities in order to win the hand of this boy. Interesting how the one perceived the most submissive is controlling those considered the most dominant. You were never interested in Lithuanian fairy tales were you, Hannibal, never read about the Almega?" Robert watched as Hannibal gave a shrug of his shoulders. "Perhaps you should have."

Chapter 12

Hannibal lay awake, his mind echoing the words of his father. There was a brief churning inward with the realisation of how he was perceived by those closest, wondering how events in his life which had shaped him could have been avoided. As quickly as they arose, those thoughts were pushed back into a dark recess, locked inside a vault he rarely opened. He heard the Omega occasionally muttering in his sleep but couldn't decipher the words. Nothing fearful he had decided, just a disassembling of the day's events. He had drifted off into a half sleep when he heard the small cry, the brain instantly active he rose to check on his neighbour. Enough light to see the boy was still asleep, dark curls on the pillow and one hand showing above the blankets, fingers tightly holding onto an edge. He caught the scent which had been hidden, from the time of his rescue the boy had smelt of citric acid, the all too common odour of a fearful Omega. Now something else pervaded the air. Hannibal tilted his head back to breathe in deeply, cherry and vanilla were obvious but there was an elusive other. He felt the urge to step closer, to smell the neck where the scent glands were easy to access, but pushed it downwards feeling a trace of self loathing for his weakness and returned to he bed.

He knew he must have slipped back into sleep when the noise woke him. He was aware of the movement, hearing the closing of the bathroom door. The Omega was awake and within a short period of time he could hear the sound of the shower and decided to follow suit. Hannibal was more perfunctory than any Omega in showering and dressing. Buttoning his shirt, he could detect the sound of a drawer opening and closing, imaging the Omega dressing. He waited an appropriate length of time, before calling out asking the boy if he wanted to borrow another sweater, knowing the lack of heating this time of morning was an acquired taste. Believing to hear an affirmative answer, he picked a blue sweater and opening the door was surprised to see the boy standing, half dressed, head angled to one side, the boy's curls being roughly dried by the towel in his hand. A look of surprise on the boy's face was followed by a flash of anger.

"I am sorry, Will." The apology was genuine and a hand held out the sweater to the Omega. "I called out and thought you answered. It is very cold of a morning, I believe this may be of service."

"Sure." The boy took the sweater and placed it on the bed quickly scooping up the tee shirt and putting it on. There was one moment of pure vulnerability when the garment covered the boy's head, completely obscuring his vision as Hannibal's eyes glanced over the half naked Omega, taking in his form. The boy was devoid of any visible body hair, his slender body stretched as he pulled the clothing over his head, the darker nipples stood out against the pale skin of his chest. Hannibal looked away at least giving the boy a semblance of privacy and looked back when he heard the faint laugh. The sweater already donned, he saw the boy rolling back the too long sleeves.

"Is this another unwanted gift?"

"Two sizes too small." Hannibal wasn't surprised to see it swamped the boy.

"Still, it'll keep me warm." Will said with a smile. "Thank you."

They stood for a moment looking at each other, an anticipation between them when Hannibal broke the mood.

"I want something from you, a promise. You said you did not know how to repay me for yesterday, there is one thing I require."

Will nodded a response and waited. "Whatever terms are offered, I want you to promise you will refuse Valdas. He would sacrifice his happiness for the family and although I believe you would find comfort in each other, there would always be a part of him missing. With you, he would long for his home in Lithuania and away from you, he would long for you. If you agreed to live in Lithuania, leaving everyone you hold dear, you also would never be completely happy. It could never be resolved."

Will stared at him, as if searching for something, then nodded. "I promise."

Hannibal felt the relief wash through him and nodded a thanks in return. The boy began to move forward when Hannibal placed a hand on his arm.

"Will, you cannot marry Ingram. The man is a violent predator and you would not be safe. You are not content with my offer, so I am advising to repair your relationship with Randall. He may not be perfect but he will do everything in his power to make amends for his behaviour. He could change."

Will pulled back sharply from the Alpha. "You ask me to turn down your brother now are telling me to marry someone who almost got me killed."

"It is for your own good, I do not wish to see you get hurt."

Will could feel the anger rising to the surface. "Is this a joke, some sort of a game, you make me promise and then.....oh, I see."

Will walked back to the nightstand then twisted back to face Hannibal. "You made a deal with the Tiers. You try to turn me against Clark, then tell me how great Randall is. Are they giving you the land once I marry their idiot son. You make out you're so wonderful, so honest and all this time...."

Hannibal moved forward and grabbed Will's arm to keep him from moving. "I have not lied, Ingram is an abuser. You will not be safe with him and you do not deserve to be treated in that way."

Will freed his arm then with both hands hard against Hannibal's chest, he repeatedly shoved the Alpha back.

"Don't tell me what I deserve." He yelled. "I've spent months whoring myself out, maybe he's all I deserve."

In one move Hannibal grabbed the boy and threw him on his back onto the bed. Before Will had time to move, Hannibal had straddled him, yanked his arms back over his head and held

his wrists tightly down.

"Is this what you want, Will, is this what you desire. To be forced down and raped every night until you are raw, because a man like Ingram will not accept no as an answer. What will you do when he invites his friends over to partake, plead with them, threaten them. You are weak, Will and a man like Ingram will control every waking moment of your life."

Will twisted underneath him trying to escape, legs kicking into the air. "Get off, you fucking bastard, get off."

Hannibal brought his head closer. "You may feel helpless now, Will, but this is nothing compared to how you will feel when Ingram uses you. He will breed you, then discard you because you are nothing to him."

"Fuck you." Out of frustration, Will's angry voice began to disintegrate into small sobs.

Hannibal's words rasped against his ear. "Is he the man you want, Will, is he the Alpha of your dreams. Do you fantasize about him when you are alone in your bed, wish he was touching you. Tell me the kind of man you desire, the rough, the gentle, the....."

"You." The word escaped before Will had time to think.

Time seemed to stop. Will breathed hard and Hannibal's face stayed close to the boy's, then he slowly pulled back and looked at the Omega trapped underneath him. He released the wrists then rolled over to one side, pushing from the bed and getting to his feet.

Will brought his hands to his sides, slowly sitting upright then moving forward into a hunched position.

"I need some tissues." He was aware of tears running down his face, partly from anger and partly from humiliation.

Hannibal reached into his pocket and placed the handkerchief on Will's thigh. "It is clean."

"Thank you." Will wiped his eyes then his nose. The silence had become unbearable when he decided to speak. "I'm sorry I swore. Guess you're not the type to use that kind of language."

"Rarely."

"Do you mind if I skip breakfast. I can call the sanctuary and get someone to come and pick me up."

"I will drive you." Hannibal remained standing in the same spot, his back to Will, looking straight ahead.

"No, no thanks. Don't think I can stand anymore awkward silences." Will sat still unsure how to proceed.

"What will you do?"

"I'll talk to Frederick. See if we can salvage something." He stood up, hands placed on the side of his head, he pushed his fingers through his hair, finally finding the back of his neck where he slowly massaged the pain away.

"Will, I want you to promise me something." Hannibal's voice had softened.

"Now you're taking advantage. You've had your one promise." Will picked up his bag of laundry placed in a corner of the room, giving himself time to try and regain control "This wasn't supposed to be my life. My dad wanted me to go to college, wanted me to be an engineer. I always told him I was gonna be county sheriff. Of course we knew Omegas couldn't be in law enforcement, but he never discouraged me, always said you should dream high."

Will stood motionless, feeling the tension in the room. "Could I, could I please use your phone."

The fists came down twice on the dresser. The sound made Will jump and instinctively he scurried backwards until he was flush with the wall.

"I want the land and a share of both Phoenix and Winstonian. One year you will spend learning. Second year a courtship, then and only if we are compatible, two children. No more than two as I will probably be unfortunate and they will both be Omegas and at the moment, I am finding one more than enough. Do you agree?" Hannibal turned slowly to face the Omega.

Will took a deep breath and one step forward. "A pre-nuptial agreement, we have shared custody of any children if we divorce and you can't control my choice of medical care or career."

For a moment Will thought the Alpha, knowing Omegas could never maintain eye contact for very long, was about to try to stare him down, but Hannibal's eyes closed briefly with the signal of approval from his head.

"Agreed"

"You better ring Frederick, make sure the guardianship will agree to the terms."

Hannibal walked back to his room and Will lay down on the bed. Staring at the ceiling he catalogued every minute from that morning, storing the memories in his head. He heard the voice in the other room, it's pitch steady, then silence until Hannibal returned.

"He will call back within thirty minutes."

Will did not respond already mentally counting to one thousand and eight hundred, his heart pounding in his chest. He had lost count by the time he heard the ring tone, unable to hear the words, he kept perfectly still, holding his breath. Only when he heard Hannibal's voice did he finally exhale.

"Consent has been given."

T

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

To: JACK CRAWFORD (BAU) From: PAUL JORGENSEN (BAU) - Non electronic communication (NEC)

WILL GRAHAM

Confirmation empathy among Omega's with duality.
Will G lacked mentor during formative years.
- do not agree with term (medical diagnosis) empathy disorder
- he is better described as an undisciplined empath.

Agree with observation - when in close proximity Will adopts other people's speech pattern (intonation and beat) This is involuntary when asked to stop he could not - completely unaware.

"Will, what have you done?" Frederick's arm were stretched out wide from his sides.

"What I was supposed to do, Frederick, find a husband." Will sat on the edge of the bed looking up at the Beta.

"But it is so sudden."

"Frederick, I was thinking about accepting Ingram, I met him twice. I've spent a whole day with Hannibal, that's an eternity in comparison."

"What about the brother, Valdas? You haven't given him a chance."

"Hannibal said that Valdas wouldn't be good for me and I wouldn't be good for him. We'd spend too much time apart and he's right." Will watched as Frederick twisted his head around checking the room, as if looking for evidence.

"So much for brotherly love." Frederick sneered

"I thought you'd be happy that it's over, Frederick. No more socialising, no more Ryan brothers, no more meeting men who try to kidnap me."

"Point taken." Frederick moved around the room opening the bathroom door, crossing back to the armoire. "And this is the room where you will sleep once you're married. Quite nice,

quite nice." Frederick finally opened and quickly shut the connecting door, his head snapping back to Will. "That door leads to another bedroom."

"Yeah, that's where Hannibal sleeps."

"That's Hannibal Lecter's bedroom. And where did he sleep last night?"

"In his bedroom, Frederick."

"Oh, Will." Frederick began to wail. "He didn't, you didn't."

"Nothing happened, Frederick, he was the perfect gentleman." Will said. The memory of Hannibal pressing him down onto the bed briefly flashed through his mind.

"There was no kissing?" Frederick scrunched up his face. "No tongues?"

"Definitely no tongues, Frederick. I give you my word."

Will bowed his head slowly, hands clasped in his lap. "I need your approval, Frederick. I know the guardians have given consent, but it's your approval that matters the most."

Frederick was quiet for several minutes looking at the Omega perched on the bed. "I might not be particularly enamoured with Hannibal Lecter but then I'm not the one who is marrying him. As far as I'm concerned only one thing matters. Do you feel you could love him?"

"Yes." Will said softly. "I think I already do."

"Very well, you have my approval." Frederick felt a twinge of satisfaction when Will's face lit up with a wide smile.

"Aw, Frederick, you're the best." Will stood up and gave the Beta a quick hug.

Frederick gave the Omega the briefest of squeezes in return then patted him on the back. "Now down to business." He said as Will released him "Firstly, under protocol you cannot be present when these discussions take place. Secondly, as your court appointed guardian I, alone, will speak and think on your behalf. I have bought the paperwork regarding the dowry so all I need are your terms, eh, my terms."

"The three c's Frederick, custody, career and care. Hannibal has agreed to all three but I want it in writing." Will reached inside of the back pocket of his jeans and brought out a folded piece of paper, handing it to Frederick. "They're bullet points, mostly what we've discussed in the past. Oh, and Frederick, when you're with them don't try to compete. You're dealing with the Lecters, they're top range Alphas."

"So how should I behave?" Frederick straightened his tie.

"Like an Omega."

"Oh, pretend to be my mother and ask for a sherry and a foot rest."

"Frederick, I'm serious. Try and be softer and if they get domineering, act nervous and jittery, like you're gonna faint. They'll back down, at least, Mr and Mrs Lecter will,"

"Let's hope I don't faint. I do not want your intended loosening my clothing and stroking my head." Frederick noticed the smirk appearing on Will's face. "You've been around Abel Gideon far too long."

As Will walked out of the doors into the garden, Frederick accepted the seat offered him in the sitting room. He had the feeling of deja vu as he sat opposite the family, half expecting Donald Sutcliffe to walk through the door. He carefully placed his laptop on the small glass topped table in front of him and started it up. He picked up the briefcase he had set by the side of his chair and after the latches indicated their release with two short sharp clunks, he took out the gold colour folder emblazoned with black script and held it out to Robert.

"The terms requested have been granted. Therefore we present no obstacle to this wedding taking place." Frederick knew enough about the etiquette involved in arranged marriages to keep his attention focused on Robert. Robert opened the folder and looked at the paperwork before handing it to Hannibal.

"My requests presented no problems?" Frederick picked up on the surprise in Hannibal's voice.

"The land will automatically become yours after the wedding. You will have a seat on the board and shares in the Phoenix holding. You will be given a forty percent share of Winstonian Estates, forty percent will remain with the guardianship, the other twenty percent will be given to Will. We are hoping that Will may show some interest in business if he is working alongside you. As you familiarise yourself with the running of the company your share will increase incrementally."

"The terms are satisfactory." Hannibal replied.

"For our part I have added three codicils to the marriage contract. Will maintains control of his own health care and choice of career. In the event of divorce, you will agree to joint custody of any children."

"Agreed."

"If you will sign the contract and sign beside each codicil." Frederick sat, fingers drumming on his knees, for what seemed an inordinate amount of time.

"The terms requested have been granted. Therefore we present no obstacle to this wedding taking place." Robert said as he returned the folder to Frederick who studied the contents for a moment and when satisfied returned it to his briefcase.

Frederick turned his attention to his laptop only looking up briefly to glance at Hannibal. "I need your full name."

"Hannibal Tristan Lecter."

Frederick tapped the information into the machine then spun it round to face Hannibal. "If you could enter your date and country of birth, social security number and your address. Due to these special circumstances we have already obtained the wedding licence, they just need the details of the person Will is going to marry. The wedding officiant will be an Omegan Elder who also happens to be a deputy clerk with the circuit court, so everything will be legal."

"This will be a traditional wedding?" Bedelia seemed surprised.

"Will has some traditional beliefs."

"I wonder who put those in his head. This type of indoctrination should be outlawed." Alana sniffed.

"You have a problem with traditionalists?" Frederick kept his voice as calm as possible.

"I have read numerous studies which have showed how these beliefs encourage Omegan isolation. Omegas should join with society not live in enclaves." Alana sat with her head held high.

"Dr. Lecter...." Frederick begun before being interrupted.

"Dr. Bloom, I use my middle name."

"Dr. Bloom, traditional beliefs do not endorse isolation." Frederick's head moved from side to side with every word.

"These studies have been written by some of the best academics in this country who understand the pressure placed on Omegas by Omegan traditionalists."

"Beta academics with Beta prejudice." Said the Beta, the tetchiness in his voice becoming obvious.

"Enough." Hannibal's voice echoed around the room. "As long as the wedding meets legal requirements, I will not care where I get married or who officiates."

Frederick took one very deep breath, knowing he was about to drop the other shoe. He took out a brochure from his briefcase and handed it to Hannibal. "This is a local jeweller who has Will's ring size. We would like you to purchase the wedding rings from this store. I marked the styles Will prefers, the final choice is, of course, yours. As this is a traditional wedding you will also be required to purchase a collar."

As Frederick expected, the verbal onslaught came from Alana. "Surely you're not serious? The whole idea is offensive."

"It is Will's choice."

"Who's been filling this boy's head with such nonsense?"

Frederick dug his nails into the palms of his hands, trying to keep control. "No one has filled his head. Will has his reasons."

"You can't agree to this Hannibal. Father, this is insulting and damaging to this family. A collar is the ultimate symbol of oppression." Alana was in full flow and Frederick, who was on the receiving end of her icy stare, expected laser beams to shoot out of her eyes straight into his.

"The wearing of the collar is symbolic for some Omegas and is not illegal. My understanding is some younger Omegas now wear the collar type necklace in solidarity for their cousins in the south who are denied the right to vote." Robert spoke in a calm manner, trying to diffuse the situation. "You said he had his reasons, Dr. Chilton, what are they?"

Frederick took another deep breath. "The man Hobbs, who kidnapped Will, took beliefs held by other cultures and incorporated them into a warped universe his mind had created. To keep Will safe, Isabella Graham convinced Hobbs, due to her royal heritage, he and Will could be betrothed and this would be legally binding. Of course, it was nonsense but a contract was drawn up by Isabella which she insisted had to be passed to an Omega notary. The so called notary was in fact the Graham family lawyer. When he received the document he called law enforcement. Unfortunately, Hobbs in his madness believed the betrothal to be true and although this fantasy kept Will safe, Will is convinced Hobbs will not stop looking for him. Not stop looking for the one Hobbs considers to be his beloved. You can not shake this idea from Will."

"But surely with the man locked away he can be no threat." Bedelia stated.

"The trial against Hobbs and his daughter collapsed. Witnesses died or disappeared and Will was not able to testify. They were found guilty of theft, but were incarcerated for just a few years. They are now both free and Will knows it. Will refuses to leave an electronic footprint, he has no phone, no computer, no online presence. If anyone asks him where he was born he replies Baltimore. He avoids being photographed and even lost his accent to hide his origins. Will is convinced by wearing the ownership symbol of another Alpha, Hobbs would be repulsed should he track Will down."

"If the boy feels safe from wearing a piece of jewellery then I will not object." For the first time since they met, Frederick sensed some concern in Hannibal for Will's welfare.

Frederick felt humbled. "Thank you so much. Now all we have to do is set the date. Since the licence was valid for six months, we booked the officiant for every Saturday at twelve noon for that time period. If you would like to pick a Saturday."

"When is the earliest?"

Frederick looked down at the screen. "This coming Saturday."

"Good." Hannibal replied. "Then this Saturday it will be."

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Abridged summary of the conclusions of Professor Charles (geneticist) on the evolution of the dynamics.
(1) The Alpha male was the biggest predator of the dynamics followed by his female counterpart.
(2) The limited fertility window of the female Alpha forced the male Alphas to mate with the other dynamics.
(3) As an Alpha Beta mating could only produce Beta offspring, this pairing was infrequent.
(4) Smaller and passive, the Omegas were easily overpowered. The Omega females when bred produced either Omega children or children with the same dynamic as the sire.
(5) A bonding gene evolved between Alpha males and Omegas (all sexes) in order to keep the Omegas co-dependent.
(6) Later chromosomal evolution divided the Omegas into male, female and "duals" (current acceptable term). With the combination of the male physique, softer features and the ability to give birth, the "duals" were emotionally compelled to seek out the stronger Alpha male, the only dynamic able to impregnate them.

The drive back to the sanctuary had been manic. Frederick's grip on the steering wheel had been so tight, his knuckles had turned white and the constant glances in the rear view mirror had made Will nervous.

"There's no one following us, Frederick." Will was exasperated. "It's in your head, Frederick, you put it there. All that talk about lack of security and suggesting I might be vulnerable."

"I know, I know." Frederick said. "My own stupid, stupid fault."

"If you hadn't talked to Mr. Lecter about the lack of staff, none of this would've happened."

"How on earth could I know the man is an expert on security breaches, black ops and assassination attempts. He's as bad as his daughter. It's there, Will, you can't not know something once you know it" Frederick's voice had a whine to it.

"Well, he got you some more security staff." Will kept the smile hidden.

"Yes, yes, he just phones his brother-in-law who happens to be the President of the United States of America and asks to borrow some of his secret agents. And what is the problem

with that, oh yes, they're all Alphas and what do I not allow inside the sanctuary, oh yes, Alphas."

"You should have told him, Frederick."

"Of course, Will, why didn't I think of that. I should have told Robert Lecter, Alpha to phone his Alpha brother-in-law and tell him to shove his Alpha security detail because I have a no Alpha rule. I'm not going to be accused of discrimination. I may not allow Alphas in the sanctuary but that does not mean I'm Alphaphobic."

"I'm gonna miss all this, Frederick," Will gave into the smile, leaned back in his seat and looked out of the side window "...miss you."

With the secret service trying to rid itself of the "Alpha only " image and wanting to keep their newly appointed Beta agents unharmed for as long as possible, Matthew Brown had found himself assigned to one of the safest jobs, watching over the President's step-mother. Her absentmindedness meant checking her every move and when her frustration over her forgetfulness occasionally boiled over, Matthew found the right approach to keep her calm. When notified he was leaving the Sutcliffe house for a few days to protect the future husband of the President's nephew, he had felt relieved on discovering his latest posting was just thirty minutes drive from the Sutcliffe house, not far from his current charge should she have an episode and need him.

It had taken nearly every ounce of Matthew's patience trying to convince Chilton he was really a Beta. The administrator guarding the door to his domain had come as a surprise, refusing to let Matthew enter the sanctuary had been another. Matthew had explained his role, presented his written instructions and displayed his badge which showed his status, but the other man refused to yield. Chilton had only relented when Gideon had arrived and suggested Frederick use olfactory identification to reassure himself that the agent was really a Beta. Matthew had become used to the weird and wonderful with Kade Sutcliffe but being smelt by the chief administrator of the Baltimore Sanctuary now topped his list.

The introductions had been lengthy as Frederick, not content with just naming the individual members of staff, had insisted on giving an in depth description of their duties. Gideon had managed to accompany them in silence for part of the way before criticising Frederick's approach.

"He knows who we are, Frederick. The many secret agencies who run this country have files on each and every one of us. They probably know what we ate for breakfast."

Matthew remained noncommittal when questioned about the accuracy of Gideon's statement but he noticed Frederick's introductions became considerably leaner.

With his long curly hair, small stature and slender figure, Matthew sensed an air of vulnerability surrounding Will and when Matthew felt the soft touch of the boy's hand when

he shook it, he couldn't prevent a smile from appearing on his face.

"And what exactly will you do?" Will had asked

"I'm your shadow, Mr. Graham, I'll be at your side." Matthew replied

With gentle persuasion on Will's part, Frederick had decided he would be better employed adding the finishing touches to the wedding. As Matthew was guided by Will around the building both inside and out, he found himself warming to the Omega's easy going nature.

The day had been long and eventful and Will felt the tiredness creep up on him and was glad when Frederick suggested an early night. With Matthew sitting opposite and Frederick meandering around the room, Will sank into the couch and drank his warmed milk.

" I will put together the final pieces of the dossier and contact the Lecters. Of course, I will tell them I will deliver it within the next two days but they will pay a surprise visit on the pretext of doing me a favour by collecting it ."

"How do you know there will be a surprise visit?"

Protocol, Will. It insists a surprise visit to a future in-law's family is needed, in order to inspect the closets for skeletons. But of course, I shall be ready for them. This place will be shining by mid-day tomorrow, not a thing out of place. I don't want them to think you come from a dirty home." Frederick stated. "I was thinking of a small farewell dinner the day after tomorrow. Just the usual group, you, me, Abel and Jimmy."

"And Matthew" said Will

"Of course," Frederick forced the smile "and Agent Brown."

Matthew stifled a yawn as he stood by the vehicle watching Will stick his head under the hood yet again. Although the boy had told him he intended an early start, Matthew hadn't expected waking just after dawn. Will had undertaken breakfast duties, stable duties and now, not quite midday, was attempting to breath life back into a dilapidated truck. Demarcation lines already breached when Will insisted they call each other by their first names, Matthew had become aware their conversations were getting more relaxed.

"Nothing serious, just a clean up. I keep telling them it needs regular maintenance but they just keep driving it till it gets snarled up."

"Do you always work."

"Yeah, I like to be busy." Will finally stood up to face the agent. "Frederick doesn't believe in wastage, everything is repaired or recycled. I offered to buy him a new truck but he said where's the fun in that."

"I'm surprised, you doing this kind of work."

"I enjoy it, I....." Will hesitated, looking long and hard at Matthew. "Oh, I see, you thought a rich boy like me wouldn't like to get his hands dirty."

It was Matthew who broke the gaze. "Sorry, Will, that was out of line."

"We may have had money, Matt, but my dad wouldn't let me grow up rich. I had to do chores as a kid. He taught me to value people and things."

Matthew shook his head noticing the smudges of grease. You've got dirt on your face."

Will took out a clean piece of rag from his pocket and wiped his face, smearing the grease over a wider area.

"Here" said Matthew taking the cloth from Will. "You're making it worse." He moved closer and gently tilting the Omega's chin upward began to wipe the marks off his face. Will closed his eyes and Matthew noticed the long black eyelashes, the Omega's scent and their close proximity. They both stayed silent as Matthew wiped Will's face.

"Will"

Tilting his head in the direction of the voice, Will could see Frederick standing on the edge of the lawn, a few feet behind stood a group of three. As they came into focus, Will gently pushed Matthew's hand away from his face.

"Frederick was right. Seems like the Lecters have made their surprise visit."

Frederick handed Bedelia the final sheets of paper.

"These cover his food requirements. Will favours fish or vegetarian dishes although he will eat rabbit and chicken if they are chopped into pieces and don't look as if they have ever walked the earth. There is a problem with pork. He abhors it, can't even be in the same room when it is being eaten, makes him violently ill. He explained that during captivity he was fed contaminated meat, hence the reaction. I've itemised his preferences, not too many, although chocolate is also on his hate list. He doesn't like anything too sweet. I've also noted some of Will's traditional Omegan beliefs, I know you will respect his rights to observe them."

"These shouldn't present a problem." Bedelia accepted the lists from Frederick and placed them with the others. "I shall instruct our housekeeper as she prepares most of the meals and will ensure we have the appropriate laundry products in place."

Frederick took a moment to glance at the three Lecters sitting in front of him. "To make this transition easier, I will be giving you a dossier after the wedding. It will contain police statements, some court records and NOGA reports about Will. This information is highly personal and is expected to be treated as confidential. I am trusting you with it and so is

Will. A handwritten account by me will also be enclosed. As his new family, it is important you understand some of the stresses he underwent and the few triggers that can cause him upset, nothing major, but they are best avoided."

"I can assure you that anything given to us will be kept securely and his privacy will be respected." Robert declared

"I see Will has a companion." Hannibal's gaze never left Frederick's.

"Yes, he is the bodyguard your uncle provided."

"They seem close."

Frederick swallowed hard before speaking. "Will is treating agent Brown in the same manner as he would any member of the staff. Will is young and a little immature and doesn't always understand the need for protocol. I can assure you, you are his sole topic of conversation, all day long it is Hannibal, Hannibal, Hannibal. Now, if we are finished, Will can join us, and I will show you some of our preparations for the wedding. Unfortunately, the sanctuary is not up to it's usual standard, had I known you were coming, I would've spruced the place up a little."

Chapter 15

It was driving back from Baltimore, when Hannibal became aware there was something ghosting over his skin making it prickle. As he passed the access road to the sanctuary he momentarily visualized the Omega's face, full of warmth and smears of grease, and felt the pull. There was something about the previous day which had gnawed at him, he had been seeking a deception to justify an angry response but when the Omega had skipped over to them, he could see no awkwardness, no guilt, just a welcoming smile. Chilton's words had been agreeable. Hannibal was conscious of his own vanity, took pride in his work and enjoyed the limelight and the praise which accompanied it, made sure even the smallest of tasks were done to perfection, but as an adult he had never sought or desired emotional adoration from others. The thought of Will's conversations revolving only around him had erupted a feeling of pride and with it, the realization he enjoyed the Omega's attention. He steered his mind back on track and banished the images from his head, telling himself to entertain any detour and to try to see the boy would be a mistake.

His mother was waiting impatiently on his return and Hannibal was inwardly pleased his indifference to the wedding preparations was being countered by her enthusiasm. Hannibal had grown used to the sterile and predictable Lecter household, but the moments when the routine radically altered, whether for good or for bad, were the moments Bedelia Lecter shone. Quiet thunder, Robert's description of Bedelia, had always rung true with Hannibal, but underneath he could also recognise within her a compulsion to see justice done, a trait she had inherited from her father.

"Did you buy my first choices?" She asked him as he carried a case of wine through to the kitchen and set it down on the floor.

"Yes, mother," he kissed the top of her head as he carefully brushed past her. "and your second and third, so when you change your mind I do not have to travel back into town."

"Did you get the Omegan blankets?" She called out after him as he left the kitchen, hearing a mumbled reply fading into the distance.

"The blankets?" She asked when he returned with the second case.

"I said I have only one pair of hands and yes, I have the blankets and everything else on your list, even the things which were not on your list which I am confident later, you will remember you desperately need."

She watched as he made three more trips before setting out the cups and making the coffee.

"No more," He held his hands up in the air as if in surrender. "if you need anything extra get father to volunteer."

"He's late tonight. Apparently there is a diplomatic bag coming in that needs urgent attention. I know he is Donald's advisor but trying to run a law firm as well as dealing with politicians is too much."

"He enjoys it, mother. The poor boy from Lithuania now sitting at the right hand of the most powerful man in the western world, it plays to his ego."

Bedelia laughed. "Your father has never had an ego to play to and he was never poor. He just enjoys all the shenanigans, as he puts it."

"Father is the smartest man in the room and in his quiet way, he is educating everyone in the White House accordingly." Hannibal picked up his cup and sipped the coffee before giving his mother a nod of thanks.

It was during dinner the atmosphere became noticeable. With his mother and Zeller engaging in trivial conversation and his sister theatrically attacking her meal, with every stab of her fork or cut of her knife, everything suggested an earlier altercation which Hannibal had not been party to. Even when they retired to the sitting room the mood followed, as well as a bottle of sauvignon Zeller had liberated from the ice bucket. Hannibal looked at his brother slouched in one of the chairs and as they made contact, Zeller rolled his eyes skyward and gave a small shrug as Alana left the room for the third time.

"Problems?" Hannibal addressed his mother taking advantage of his sister's absence.

"It's best to ignore her until she finds another axe to grind."

"The wedding?" Hannibal asked.

"We had the full litany of Omegan rights earlier." Zeller like the other members of the family had grown tired of his sister's hectoring.

"If she wishes to voice her disapproval she should speak to me not to you or mother."

Bedelia sighed. "It would appear it is my reaction which is creating the problem. She would prefer if I remained distant toward the proceedings, but as I carefully pointed out , however unorthodox this marriage is, it doesn't mean it has to be half measured and to remain aloof would not be fair on the boy. It is his day, Hannibal and I am determined it will be remembered for being at least enjoyable, if nothing more."

"Talking of enjoyment, can we make this your bachelor party?" Zeller held up his wine glass. "I didn't think you were planning to celebrate tomorrow night."

"You, me and mother, why not. An unorthodox wedding deserves and an unorthodox bachelor party. I have a few very special bottles of cote de nuits and a particular fine single malt whisky, if you can be tempted." Hannibal said co-operating for the sake of his mother and hoping to lift the mood.

As they tried to navigate the evening without incident, Hannibal showed his mother the rings and necklace purchased earlier. Bedelia, attracted to the necklace, held it at an angle to reflect the light.

"Most would consider this a necklace rather than a collar." She said wistfully. "Beautiful craftsmanship, understated."

"Collace, the fashionable name I understand from the jeweller, popular with the young."

"Yet still offensive to some."

"Some find offence in anything which does not conform to their ideology. This is Will's choice and we have to accept it." Hannibal replied.

"I may not approve the symbolism but I understand the boy's fears. Given time he may be able to overcome them and this may not be required."

As Hannibal returned the necklace to it's case, he saw Alana returning to the room and knew from her expression as she glared at his hand, the explosion which had been simmering under the surface was about to take place. He leaned back into the couch as she started her verbal onslaught. Cushioned by the whisky, he ignored the statements which poured, quick and clipped, from her mouth.

With patience wearing thin, Bedelia finally intervened. "Please, Alana, you've already voiced your disapproval earlier and you agreed to be civil."

"Mother, you and I both know this is wrong. To marry a boy he hardly knows for profit is exploitation, marrying a vulnerable Omega is almost criminal."

Hannibal felt the anger rising. "Will has willingly entered into this agreement. He is intelligent and informed. Would you prefer he returns to the south, face uncertainty or be imperilled?"

"Well, there is one certainty you can be assured of, I will not be attending this wedding."

"Want to bet?" The deep rich tone came from behind and when the arms encircled her, squeezing her, she felt her anger dissipate and laughed out his name.

"Valdas!"

Matthew had watched as Frederick mustered his troops. One by one the staff filed into the living quarters and were given their duties for the next day, first verbally and then in writing.

"Why doesn't he just give them the list? Matthew had asked Jimmy

The Omega grinned. "Less melodramatic."

Jimmy had calmed down since the morning, more his cheery self. Matthew hadn't heard the start of the fracas between the Omega and Frederick, but caught the last of Jimmy's salvos being fired.

"Sure, Frederick, they're all goodwill and smiles, then they throw you under the bus. The liberal Alpha does not exist."

Their paths crossed not long after in the kitchen where Matthew and Abel were drinking their coffee.

"You heard." Jimmy's words meant for both men

"Hard not to." Matthew replied

"I don't hate Alphas, just don't think Will should be forced, you know." Jimmy directed his remarks towards Matthew. "He's Omega, we never completely recover, we just turn it around, you know, blame ourselves. I'm not prejudice."

"My comrade's remarks relate to Will's experiences." Abel stated

"The Alphas, the ones who took him, they forced him to do things and even when he did them, those bastards still killed his mother." Jimmy continued. "Lost count the number of times Will's screams would wake me up during the night, hear him crying out for her, for all of them."

"We could never anticipate when the nightmares coiled beneath Will's pillow would strike." Abel disclosed

Matthew had read the reports. Will's abduction, Jimmy's employment with the FBI that ended with his spectacular breakdown, the incarceration of Abel Gideon, a man who had been a victim to a major travesty of justice, who had lost everything but showed no sign of self pity or anger. Matthew had warmed to Abel, to his intelligence and wit. He could imagine sitting in a bar with Gideon, supping beer, listening to the man regale him about his previous life as a celebrated surgeon then as a detainee at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

As afternoon drifted into early evening, Matthew had watched Abel prepare Will's choice for their celebratory meal, home made pizza. As Abel kneaded the dough, Will had thrown out a remark.

"Abel's a qualified chef."

"Of course he is." Matthew had smiled the response. "And has a certificate in cosmetology."

For the first time Matthew saw Abel's face sport a wide grin.

"I am comforted by the news that the secret service have updated their files on me."

Matthew grinned in return, realising he had inadvertently confirmed the files existence, after days of subtle questioning had brought no confirmation.

The food had been delicious and Matthew couldn't stop his enthusing. The apple cider which had accompanied the meal was stronger than expected and he was glad he had restricted himself to a very small glass. Eventually adjourning to the sitting room, the conversation flowed ranging from tasks completed, to those still on the agenda with apple cider bottles being joined by a whisky bottle and cans of beer. Frederick pouring whisky into his glass with great aplomb, reminded them the wedding rehearsal would take place the next day and he would personally inspect the outfits they intended to wear for the ceremony. Much later, having excused himself, Frederick returned to the room carrying a large bowl, which by the smell, Matthew had correctly deduced was filled with lavender scented water. He watched transfixed as Frederick removed his shoes and socks and tentatively slipped his feet into the water.

"Yes, we have to prepare ourselves for the big day. Seeing we have to bare ourselves before mother nature."

Matthew's frown was caught by Abel who said. "It is a traditional Omegan wedding."

Matthew smiled. "I went to one, you have to take off your shoes and socks."

Frederick lifted his feet out of the water and showed the bottoms to Matthew. "Yes, we have to bare our soles to mother nature." Chuckling at his own joke and taking another sip of the whisky.

"No, this is a authentic Omegan wedding. We have to bare everything." Will said dropping his head forward.

"Naked as the day we were born." Abel concurred staring straight at Matthew.

Matthew smiled and shook his head. "My mother is an Omega, I know some of the traditionalist practices, never heard of one where you're naked."

"But is she from the south, Agent Brown?" Frederick said, suddenly leaning forward in his chair.

"Well, no." They could all hear the hesitancy in Matthew's voice.

"Well, Will is from the south and in the south it's warmer." Jimmy stated. "I went to one in winter, had to dangle my dongle in brandy to get the circulation going."

"Friction would have been far more effective." Abel advised.

"I did ask for a hand, but nobody would oblige." As a look of sadness enveloped Jimmy's face, a snort of laughter escaped from Will.

"I don't believe the President's security force will stand around without clothes."

"The President is a guest, he too will follow tradition. He will be naked as a jay bird." Abel said.

"Then after the ceremony, we all hold hands and dance around in a circle singing Glory to Gaia." Jimmy clasped his hands together as if in prayer.

"Yeah, then the officiant raises her arms skywards." Will raised his arms above his head, moving them from side to side.

"Then in time honoured tradition we face east, bend forward and splay our buttocks to the setting sun." Abel announced with due solemnity.

Matthew looked at the group, all sitting with deadly earnest written on their faces, his eyes flickered from one to another until Will broke down laughing, his arms flopping to his sides. Matthew's professional approach dissolved when Frederick's laughter, alternating between a high pitched giggle and a braying donkey, filled the room. Only Gideon stayed in control with just a hint of a smile.

"Aw, Matthew," Will managed between laughs "your face."

A gentle banter between the group continued as the evening wore on, each becoming less articulate. As Matthew watched and listened as they reminisced about the good times and the bad, how they went through them together, it was clear to him their relationship wasn't just friendship but more akin to family, a motley band of brothers.

Chapter 16

A week ago Matthew would have been surprised but the last few days at the sanctuary had left him somewhat blasé. Frederick standing in the kitchen drinking coffee wasn't unusual. Frederick standing in the kitchen drinking coffee, wearing sunglasses and what appeared to be a woman's dressing gown was a little different. Matthew didn't even have to ask as he entered the room.

"It's his mothers, his one is still being laundered." Jimmy shot out

"I'm afraid Frederick is feeling a little out of sorts this morning, not his usual early bird who catches the....." Abel stopped as Frederick snapped.

"Don't say it. I'm queasy enough. If only one of you had stopped me, I wouldn't have got in such a state."

"You are a grown man, Frederick, you are entitled to make your own decisions, even the erroneous ones."

"Besides" Jimmy chipped in "you were enjoying yourself. I never knew you could sing so well. Loved your Barbra Streisand tribute."

"Yes, well, thank you, but that was last night. This morning I feel as if I have a herd of elephants tap dancing in my head." Frederick said, leaning back against a cabinet with the hem of the gown riding up above the knees.

Matthew knew he was about to embark on another roller coaster day.

There was a lightening of the mood around the sanctuary since the deep cleaning had finished, less frantic, more anticipation, even joyful. With Frederick clutching an ice pack to his forehead, Matthew was amazed how much was achieved in a short space of time and how well a hung over Frederick coped. Wedding rehearsals finished and outfits inspected, Matthew helped Will pack clothes into suitcases and books into boxes. Abel wandered into the room from time to time holding up an item for Will to decide whether to take, keep or discard. It was an unspoken understanding, Will may be physically leaving the sanctuary but his room would be kept aside, a bolt hole, a just in case, if he needed it. As the day wore on with Will becoming more muted, the others matched his mood by being more refrained. By evening, Will and Frederick sat in a corner of the sitting room, correspondence lay scattered on the table in front of them with Frederick intermittently handing Will a piece of paper. Jimmy had discreetly motioned Matthew out of the room and once out of earshot gave an explanation.

"They're talking about Will's dad, personal stuff. Frederick knew the family, he keeps Will connected with the past, the good parts."

With an early night already agreed, Matthew noticed Will moving around the kitchen, touching the counter tops, the appliances, looking at walls then the ceiling as if committing

them to memory.

"I wish they could come with me, Frederick, Abel and Jimmy."

"You'll be just along the road, you can visit." Matthew said in an reassuring manner.

"Then why do I feel I'm seeing everything for the last time."

Robert was still pleased with himself, pleased his ruse had worked. Having developed a tendency to use the same gambit to try to surprise Bedelia, she frequently anticipated the deception, but the diplomatic bag had been inspirational. Sometimes delayed due to the last minute hitches when undertaking his White House duties, she had grown used to his late homecoming on certain nights. The timing of the arrival of Valdas on one of these nights had avoided suspicion, their entrance everything he had hoped. The reaction to her eldest son's appearance, smiles then tears, was etched in his mind and as the family sat up to the early hours chatting, he felt an inner peace. The next day he found the high spirits lowered with Alana adamant she would not attend the wedding, Hannibal still smarting over the inference that the impending marriage was a form of Omega abuse and Zeller obviously tired of the whole situation, Robert felt he was swimming through choppy waters.

Valdas had waited before he made his move. As the family sat around listening to Bedelia read out the order of service, the tension was apparent. Alana, by virtue of sitting in a chair away from the rest, had managed to isolate herself from the proceedings without leaving the room. Getting up and facing his sister, Valdas removed his phone from inside his jacket and placed it to his ear.

"Ring ring, ring ring. Hello Freddie, this is Valdas, yes, Valdas Lecter. I have a scoop for you, Red. My brother Hannibal is getting married to a beautiful Omega and my sister is boycotting the wedding. Why Freddie, oh, because she doesn't want the Lecter dynasty to be tainted with Omegas. Oh, and she also says all Omegas are nasty and smell bad."

"You wouldn't." Alana stared at him

"Other people will. Freddie Lounds pays good money. They will make it up for the cash. You can deny what will be said about you but the damage will be done. Some will believe it."

"Then I'll sue."

Valdas knelt in front of his sister, taking her hands in his. Looking straight into her eyes he spoke in hushed tones. "You are beautiful, Alana, both inside and out and beautiful people always attract the haters. They will twist this to damage your career. Even the boy will suffer thinking he has created a family feud. Some will even blame the Omega. I want a happy reunion, not for us to fight. I don't want to go home with bad memories."

Alana expression didn't change. "You are trying to blackmail me emotionally."

"Yes, I know." Valdas tilted his head to one side. "The important thing is, is it working?"

Alana shook her head in disbelief as she conceded defeat. "Damn you, Valdas, you always know what strings to pull. Okay, I'll go, just to shut you up."

The constant murmuring had woken Matthew and he followed the sound. It was Frederick's words he could make out first as he neared the kitchen.

"You don't have to go through with this, Will."

"Frederick, I'm good. I want this." Even Matthew could tell the attempt Will was making to sound cheerful wasn't completely honest.

"Will?" Frederick raised an eyebrow

"I snuck out earlier to look at the wedding area. It's just the seating, a bit light on my side. Reminded me who won't be there."

"I'm sorry, Will, I didn't think. I suppose I could round up a few of the guards." Frederick's pained expression covered his face.

"A suggestion, Frederick." Matthew jumped at the words. He hadn't heard the footsteps or sensed Abel approaching. "As Agent Brown is supposed to be guarding Will, perhaps it would be more appropriate if he sat with us."

"I have to stay at Will's side." Matthew responded

"No, no." Frederick countered. "If you stay at his side during the ceremony you could create a mix up and end up marrying Hannibal Lecter." Before Abel had time to speak, Frederick pointed his index finger straight at him. "Don't"

"Not a word, Frederick."

"I'll contact Donald." Frederick called out as he walked away. "I'm sure something can be arranged."

It was barely ten minutes before Frederick returned beaming.

"President Sutcliffe requests you sit with the guests during the ceremony. As the outside will be swarming with Alpha agents, your services will be temporarily suspended. If you have no objections, Agent Brown, you will be joining our little family."

"Dr. Chilton, I would consider it an honour and a privilege."

Robert was getting slightly irritated. "No, you can not check my feet, Bedelia, I have put on the new socks you provided and there are no holes in them."

"I don't want you to embarrass yourself at this ceremony."

"No, you do not want me to embarrass you at this ceremony."

"Did you trim your toe nails?"

Robert slapped the palm of his hand against his forehead and addressed his children. "Good grief, your mother is beyond belief. She's probably worried that if I have a heart attack and paramedics are called, the first thing they would do, would be to look at my feet." He stared at Bedelia. "Do you want to inspect my under garments to make sure they are clean?"

Zeller picked up a drink from the table and handed it to his father. "Come on, make your speech, dad."

Robert took the flute and sipped the champagne. "Firstly, I would like to say how happy I am to see all my children here today. The wedding has brought us all together even if it is for a short period of time. This may not be a traditional love match but it has always been my experience, marriages of convenience have a tendency to last. Having met with this young man and found myself warming to him, I hope both he and Hannibal find a path which will lead to harmony."

As the group lifted their glasses to their lips, Robert's eyes searched Hannibal's face for something and finding nothing, looked away.

Hannibal and Valdas stood back as the others made their way to the cars. Hannibal taking the opportunity to pour himself a brandy, downed it in one go. Valdas fumbled in his pocket and bought out the mints.

"Is that your happy face or your stoic one? Difficult to tell."

Hannibal shrugged. "Fate and circumstances have brought me to this moment. Will Graham needs me as much as I need him."

"Grandfather Sutcliffe said you should see the man first not the dynamic. Don't let past experiences cloud your judgement, you can not hold this boy accountable for mistakes made by the other Omegas in your life."

"Will is being given a rare gift. He is young and can be trained to become a success in his own right, a beacon to other Omegas. Someone I could have pride in."

Valdas placed his arm around his brother's shoulder as they walked towards the Bentley. "And I thought romance was dead."

Chapter 17

The Elder's instructions had been clear, concise and coupled with humour. Will waited at the edge of the carpet with no tie and the top two buttons of his shirt already undone. Trying to prepare for the placing of the collar during the ceremony by fiddling with buttons spoilt the flow, she had explained and it was best to be ready in advance. The royal blue carpet edged with gold squares looked immaculate, although in all probability, had been used countless of times.

As Will was classed "the intended" he would be the one invited into the ceremony. Once beckoned, ten paces would take him to the altar, which was adorned with a cream and gold cloth and two jasmine scented candles seated at opposite ends, the traditional flower crown centrally placed between the two. The Elder had made him practice the day before, moving too slow and he would look reluctant, too fast he could trip and stumble, timing was everything. Once by Hannibal's side, the vows and binding would take ten minutes.

As he waited for the signal he glanced at the guests sitting on the white chairs, four on his side, more for the Lecters. Will had chosen to wear a blue suit as a symbol of the calm sea whilst Hannibal had selected a grey suit and black shirt representing the strength of the storm. The officiant told Will these pairings of the spectrum were a good omen, they would learn to respect each, compliment each other. He suspected she said it to everyone.

Her opening words were his signal. *"Hannibal Lecter, son of Robert, and Will Graham, son of Andrew, have declared their intention of taking each other in marriage. This is to certify to all whom it may concern by attending this assembly you have expressed your consent."*

With everyone remaining seated, signifying agreement with the union, Will walked towards the centre. The officiant dressed in a cream suit with a yellow rose pinned to her lapel oozed serenity, her smile reassuring. As Hannibal and Will declared they would take each other as their lawfully wedded husband, Will couldn't help but let out a sigh of relief. When unexpectedly the Alpha touched his arm, Will looked at Hannibal and whispered "I'm safe."

Hannibal hadn't expected the reaction. The formality of the ceremony had similar aspects to any business deal, his thoughts were with the land and the companies, but the boy's response was unexpected and he found the novelty in it. He had expected the boy to be thinking of love not of safety. Throughout the ceremony Hannibal, as requested by the officiant had looked towards her, but now with his sight on the Omega, he felt an attraction. For the first time, seeing Will dressed for an occasion, he found the boy ridiculously beautiful.

Hannibal took the ring from the Elder, placing it on Will's finger and in a clear voice stated. "I declare I will stand by your side to protect and guide you."

Will reciprocated the action. "I declare I will stand by your side always loyal and faithfully yours."

Hannibal took the white gold necklace carefully placing it around the Omega's neck, securing the clasp as the Elder said *"destiny"* Hannibal gently grasped the Omega's hand and with

their fingers intertwined, the woman took a ribbon, one at a time, from a gold coloured casket placed just below the altar, naming each one as she loosely tied the couple together at the wrist *"unity, tranquillity, fidelity, infinity"*

With the ceremony completed, the Elder gave a nod and with his free hand, Hannibal tenderly turned Will's face towards him and gave the Omega a chaste kiss on the lips.

Frederick came into his own. Once the clapping had quietened and the photographs taken - Frederick had made sure the agreements that no photos could be posted online had been signed - he carefully directed the guests, now reunited with their footwear, to the tables. The weather had been kind, not too hot which potentially could be as bad as rain when a ceremony was conducted outside and even the sanctuary building, which had been the backdrop to the wedding, looked at it's best. The Beta took satisfaction he had managed to find an officiant who was also an Elder and showed her due reverence.

"She's a court appointed official, Frederick." Abel had remarked when Chilton had given a low bow in her direction. "Not the queen of the fairies."

Frederick walked the guests across the lawn to the large rustic pine tables he had managed to borrow. As guardian of Will he sat at the head of the table, Will one side of him and Kade Sutcliffe the other and while tradition dictated there should not be a seating plan, as expected a natural order had taken place. Frederick had insisted on one caveat, Jimmy be placed between Abel and Matthew to prevent too much Alpha contact and perhaps to quell any of Jimmy's monologues which became too risqué. The initial over politeness amongst the group soon disappeared when Valdas sitting next to Abel let out a roar of laughter when Abel told him his role at the sanctuary. The words "general factotum" had somehow sparked a reaction in him, unappreciated by his mother seated opposite.

"Don't say them." Bedelia had hissed at him, knowing with his heavily accented voice, the words would sound very different coming out of her son's mouth.

The food already laid out in front of them consisted of cheeses, breads, chutneys and salads with Abel's special rabbit and chicken pies. The wines provided by the Lecters were readily available with only Will staying with the apple cider. Frederick's smile grew wider hearing the compliments and appreciative noises as his guests wined and dined.

Donald, finally giving into the itch he had needed to scratch from the first time he saw him, leaned forward and spoke to Abel.

"I know you, don't I?"

"Yes, you and Frederick attended one of the lectures I gave at the Omega General hospital. I am the surgeon who didn't kill all those people."

Almost immediately Will sensed Frederick tense up. "It's okay." He mouthed to the Beta, trying to suppress the smile.

"Of course, Abel Gideon, terrible miscarriage of justice." Donald continued. "You were in jail for a couple of years before they released you."

"Two years, eight months and six days to be precise. As a guest of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane."

"Yeah, they thought he was the Cumberland Cutter." Jimmy joined in. "Then they tried to pin the Chesapeake Ripper murders on him as well."

"Though I have always acknowledged I was partly to blame. Never joke with law enforcement, especially in Maryland. When they asked for my alibi on the nights of the Ripper murders I jokingly suggested I was killing elsewhere so couldn't possibly be the Ripper. Unfortunately, they believed me and spent months trying to find non existent victims of crimes I had never committed, tracing my movements back over several years. It was then I discovered how much of our lives our monitored."

"But they realised their mistake eventually." Zeller said now wrapped up in the conversation.

"Actually it was Frederick who helped gain my release."

As all eyes turned on Frederick, he waved his napkin in front of his face and sank lower in his chair. "It was nothing, just a little assistance. I worked occasionally with the Baltimore Police Department."

"Frederick is a good profiler and soon came to the conclusion I was not responsible for the crimes and found an excellent lawyer to assist me with my appeal. In fact, it was my friend on my left who found the evidence which lead to the capture of the actual Cutter."

"It was my team, when I worked for the FBI." Jimmy said in all modesty.

"An Omega agent in the FBI, that's unusual." Donald stated.

"I worked in forensics, one of the first, till my breakdown. Saw things no Omega could handle, so one day I just snapped. Got it into my head that one of the victims looked like my uncle Charlie so stole the body to take it on vacation. Thought he looked a little peaky and could do with some sun. Would have got away with it if I hadn't asked for an upgrade at the airport."

"Yes" Robert commiserated. "Those upgrades can be tricky."

"Well, someone noticed Charlie was tied to the wheelchair with ropes so security was called. Can you believe it, these guys were talking to a corpse asking him if he had been kidnapped. Crazy."

"I take it Charlie missed the flight." asked Robert

"Yeah, so did I. He went back to the freezer and I went to jail. It was my boss, Jack Crawford who got me out. He persuaded the authorities to drop the charges, in return, I came here. Been here ever since."

"You're a dark horse, Frederick." Donald remarked. "Never knew about your other activities or your interesting friends."

"Well, some things are best kept to ourselves." Frederick said glaring at his colleagues hoping they would shut up.

"Anyway," Jimmy said finishing another glass of wine. "We all helped to bring up young Will, helped him in his education, helping him to fulfil his ambition."

"Yes" said Abel "My friend here has aided with the study of entomology and I have shown Will the several ways you can murder someone and make it look like a medical mishap."

"What do you want to be, Will?" asked Donald

As all eyes turned on Will, he looked at Frederick for assistance who smiled and mouthed. "It's okay."

As they stood at the steps of the sanctuary watching the cars leave one by one, Hannibal left Will to say his goodbyes. His eyes brimming with tears, Will pulled Frederick into a hug.

"I can't find the words." Will said as they held each other close until Will nodded indicating he was ready to leave.

As the Bentley left the grounds, Will continued to wave at the group until they disappeared from view, then sat silently for the rest of the journey, staring out of the car window.

Will heard the noise as he got out of the car and stopped on the driveway. Hannibal had already walked towards the house before he became aware the Omega had come to a halt. He watched as Will's head turned in the direction of the closing gates.

"Will." Will looked back to him the third time his name was called, the look of apprehension was clearly visible.

"The gates are to keep intruders out not to keep you in." Almost immediately Hannibal realised his attempts to diminish the situation had misfired as the boy adjusted the position of his feet as if to take flight.

"Will." Hannibal's voice was harder. "You are needed inside, the family are waiting for you."

As Will turned again, he looked intently at the Alpha then gave a small laugh. "Sorry, it was the noise, it distracted me."

The boy slowly headed towards the Alpha and Hannibal made him take the lead, his hand in the small of the Omega's back, guiding him. At close quarters, Will attempts at appearing relaxed were betrayed by his scent and as they made their way through to the sun room and the boy sat down in the chair offered, Hannibal knew the smile Will had pasted over his face didn't match the look in his eyes.

Kade Sutcliffe seeing the Omega settled, sat down in the chair next to him and slipped her hand through the gap between his arm and body, pulling the boy closer.

"I'm glad you've come home." She said her eyes moist with tears.

The continuous small talk around him was upsetting. Talking at him rather than to him, he was their captive audience. Bedelia attempts to put him at ease by praising the wedding had left him short of replies and Kade's well meaning grip on his arm kept him from following his instincts to find somewhere to hide. The room was crowding in on him and for the first time in years, he felt trapped. He had managed a few sips of the lemonade Bedelia had given him, aware the others were drinking alcohol and he alone had been given something better suited for a child. Will sensed the tipping point was quickly approaching when he would make an excuse, ask for the bathroom then run home. As the scenario played round in his head, he heard his name being called.

"Will, would you like another drink?" Bedelia was standing closer, helping Kade from her chair.

Will took a quick glance at the table and saw his empty glass and shook his head.

"Come on, mother, you need a rest." As Bedelia helped the elderly Omega out of the chair and they began to walk side by side out of the room, Will followed in their wake. When she was in whispering range, he told Bedelia "bathroom" as an explanation for his accompanying them.

He had lost time. Seeing the empty glass and having no memory of drinking the contents, the evidence was there. He had closed his eyes and searched for his quiet place. The thought of loss of control elevated his anxiety and he felt the palms of his hands leak sweat. As they reached the hallway, Alana had joined them and linking arms with the old woman began chattering, guiding her toward the main stairs. Bedelia held back, touching Will's arm.

"She needs a short nap, helps her get her bearings." Will was aware Bedelia was patting his upper arm with her fingers, offering an apology. "She's confusing you with Nicky, Donald's son. He had dark curly hair and blue eyes and she thinks he's come back. I'm sorry, it can be awkward sometimes."

Understanding the situation put him at ease. "No, no, I'm good. It's okay."

The patting hand transferred into a reassuring squeeze. "Thank you, Will. This day has meant so much to me, to us. To have all my family under the same roof, including the newest member, has made me very happy."

It was the moment that Will knew she had tied him to her.

Will splashed the cold water over his face in an attempt to ground himself. Having taken refuge in his bedroom he tried to compose himself and return to the others. Seeing his suitcases placed in his room, the Omegan desire for homeliness took over and he instinctively began to unpack the contents, laying them out over his bed. The knock on the door was gentle and opening it carefully, he saw Hannibal with a concerned look on his face.

"Are you okay, Will, it has been a while. Thought you may have got lost."

Will stood back and opened the door wider and with a sweep of his arm gestured towards the clothes. "Sorry, got carried away. I was getting a bit overwhelmed. Not used to socialising." He answered truthfully.

"Unfortunately, the socialising is not over. The family in Lithuania wish a quick hello, we have Skype. They want to see you." Hannibal's expression was full of apology.

Suddenly his head felt heavy and as it sank forward, Will felt he was walking towards his doom, feeling his nerves light up. He felt the Alpha's hand placed on his shoulder and Will managed a whispered. "Sorry."

"If it is any consolation you have carried yourself admirably today. I forget you are in the Omega's equivalent of a lion's den, a houseful of Alphas. If there is anything you need, I can do?"

For a brief second Will thought about asking for a hug but doubted the Alpha would comply or appreciate the request, instead he looked into Hannibal's eyes and took a deep breath. Once the scent of cedar and musk hit him, he felt calmer and Will sensed the words Hannibal would want to hear. "The sooner we get down there, the sooner it's over."

For the first time that day Will saw Hannibal's face break into a smile and the Omega felt a small wave of pleasure ripple through him.

They returned to a melee in the sitting room with everyone vying for a seat. Zeller, who was trying to communicate with the laptop called out in desperation. "I need a foreigner. They're either speaking Lithuanian or drunk."

"Most likely both." Robert huffed not always appreciating the wilder side of his family. "Bring it here."

Hannibal directed Will to the couch where they sat side by side. The ordeal was over quicker than Will had expected, besides the collective "ahh" which greeted him when he was first seen by the extended Lithuanian family, the rest of the time he listened as Hannibal spoke to them in his native language. The words tripping off his tongue were smooth and mellow and Will, more than once, found himself sneaking a look at the man beside him. This prompted more "ahhs" from the Lithuanians who were watching his every move and when he ducked his head in embarrassment due to their reaction, more sounds of endearment rang out. Finally, after giving a few waves of his hand, the laptop was passed back to Zeller and Will sank back into the couch.

"Try this, you need it." Valdas handed a half filled glass to Will. "Fortified apple wine, I saw you liked the apple cider."

Will took a sip and pulled a face. "That's good, strong, but good."

"It'll put hairs on your chest."

"I was hoping that won't happen for at least thirty years."

Valdas laughed as he sat down. "The dual meta. Good you have a sense of humour, Will, you will need it with this family."

Will smiled. "Duals tell the best jokes about themselves. Besides meta is a natural process."

"No different to the woman's change of life." Valdas replied

"Yeah, except women don't end up with a bushy beard and a hairy chest." Will grinned

"They do in Lithuania." Valdas said louder than necessary, bringing a loud huff from Alana, knowing the last part of the conversation had been for her benefit.

"Is she resting?" Robert asked Bedelia as she returned to her seat.

"Unfortunately, due to her health, my mother has taken against Robert." Bedelia explained to Will

"She never liked me before." Robert added

Donald jokingly protested. "Be fair, Robert, nobody would have been good enough to marry her Bedelia."

"It is impossible to relax around her. She told a White House aide I sleep in a coffin in the basement and I drink blood. Next day she was fully aware and lucid, to all intents and purposes compos mentis. The following week I discover she had convinced her cousin that I was trying to kill her. It's as if my mother-in-law deliberately lulls me into a false sense of security only to strike again when I've let my defences down. I see her as an elderly ninja." Robert shook his head in exasperation.

As the afternoon wore on, the intensity lessened and Will finally relaxed, content to listen to the reminisces of the Lecters, consequently learning more about Hannibal. Nearing six

o'clock Donald bid a farewell as he and Kade left with Robert in tow, the Presidential car sandwiched between the secret service agents in their vehicles. Robert had made his excuses, kissing Bedelia and saying he would be back soon. When engaged in business on behalf of his brother-in-law, nobody asked him details. The cars reached Sutcliffe house within fifty minutes and Robert, transferring to an agent's car, stopped as Donald touched his arm.

"I feel guilty about this, Robert, dragging you away from the family."

Robert gave a shake of his head. "No need. The rebirth of Baltimore is needed and this one little nudge maybe all that is required. Don't forget, Donald, horse trading is my speciality and meeting with a few officials in a congenial setting isn't a hardship. At least I can enjoy the wine seeing as you have supplied the chauffeur."

It was a short walk from the parking lot to the club. Robert welcomed the occasional break from the fashionable "need to be seen in" restaurants that had surfaced in Baltimore over the last few years. His club, the last vestige of a world soon destined for the non-recyclable bin, represented the world he had aspired to when young. Full of men and women of a certain age, he was comfortable sitting in one of the large armchairs reading an actual newspaper rather than scanning the digital express. With a glass of his favourite red in his hand, he could wait until a fellow traveller from the world of law entered his realm to settle a lawsuit without a presiding judge or twelve of his client's peers presence being felt, and where a handshake sealing the bargain was sufficient as any signed document. He had neared the steps to the entrance when a figure stepped out from the shadows.

"You're a difficult man to contact, Mr. Lecter." Freddie Lounds stood tall in high heels, her purse clutched to her side.

"Good evening, Miss. Lounds and what do I owe this pleasure?" Robert had always expected the unexpected when in Baltimore.

"We have a deal, Mr. Lecter, one which now needs to be renegotiated."

Without caring to admit it in public, Robert had a certain admiration for Freddie Lounds, even enjoyed the game they played. Her talent for seeking out the story then shaping it to her advantage was worthy of any politician he had ever encountered and he had occasionally felt the temptation to set her against a foe he knew would fight back hard, just to see who would emerge victorious.

"Your son's marriage to Will Graham. I have exclusive information on this boy's past."

"Be careful not to overplay your hand. I doubt very much your readership would show the same amount of interest as you in a young Omega who has married into the Lecter family."

"Will Graham's story is one my readers would find of interest, especially the part where the state of Louisiana accused him of being an integral player in a gang of marauders who

terrorised and killed innocent homeowners. His redemption and of course, the charitable nature of the Lecter family to allow such a delinquent into their midst, could became a long running saga."

"The state of Louisiana would have levelled any and all accusations at the boy, even those it would have been impossible for him to have committed, simply to ensure his return and the control of his money. Money being the all-consuming word where Louisiana was concerned. As you are proposing I buy your silence once again, what this are you offering for my that?"

"Will Graham is never to be headlined except, of course, if he goes on another murder spree. The few times when I have no alternative but to make reference to him, then no link to his past will appear and the boy when featured will be surrounded in a halo of gold."

"And my that?"

"That you give me three exclusives over the next year. As much as I appreciate your tips just before they break surface, I want those which are still swimming deep under the water. I'm not greedy, three is an excellent number."

"You should consider politics as a career move, you have a talent for it. You have my word if I have yours." Robert held out his hand which Freddie shook firmly in response

Chapter 18

"Observe, Will." Frederick had advised. "Sit back, listen and observe the interaction between the Lecters, not between you and them, but between themselves. With family members, their defences will be down and you can peek inside the suit of armour successful people use to shield themselves from scrutiny."

Will first saw their fragments on the outer boundaries of his peripheral vision then gradually stitched them together. Robert, the man possessed with a sense of fun at odds with his cool, logical exterior. Zeller, the peacekeeper, happy to be self sacrificing for the sake of harmony. Bedelia, charming and dignified with a touch of steel, ready to reinforce the perimeters of her family unit but hiding her need to nurture.

"Don't misinterpret the signals, Will." Frederick insisted. "Omegas are very tactile, Alphas more controlled. Let them make the running or you may find yourself rebuked. You have experienced touch starvation so don't concoct daydreams around the smallest of gestures as they may be nothing more than politeness."

Will didn't consider it touch starvation, more touch aversion, under Abigail's therapeutic instruction. Never knowing whether the hand would gently stroke his face or deliver a hard slap had unsettled him to such an extent he had flinched at all physical contact for over two years.

Will had felt proud after he opened the door to Hannibal that morning. As he stood in the doorway, Will couldn't resist looking the Alpha over from head to feet. Dressed in black slacks with the black shirt open at the neck, Hannibal looked handsome and dangerous to Will and instinctively *"my Alpha"* lodged in his brain.

"Breakfast will be ready in ten minutes. I would prefer you do not lock the connecting door between the bedrooms in future, unless I am not at home. I will always knock and seek your permission to enter, unless there is an emergency. You can call on me anytime, if needed. Valdas and I will be taking a stroll to the lake after breakfast, if you care to join us, Will, you would be very welcome."

"Yeah, that'll be good. I wasn't sure what to wear for meals. You were all dressed up last time I was here."

"Weekdays you should wear a shirt, my father is old fashioned that way, but weekends it can be casual within reason."

Hannibal looked at the boy dressed in jeans and black tee shirt. "What you are wearing is acceptable."

"I haven't got that many smart clothes, didn't need them at the sanctuary, and well, didn't have time to get more before the wedding."

"Never mind, Will, something can be arranged within the next few days. For now we shall just relax and enjoy ourselves."

A broad smile broke over Will's face on hearing the word "we".

The track from the house to the lake had been smoothed over to make the walk easier for Robert and Donald when they decided to fish and the newly installed chain link fence which separated the garden of the main house from the rest of the estate had been erected after Donald's victory, Hannibal had explained.

"When our uncle visits the grounds are guarded by secret service agents. You will be acquainted with them but on no account run from them if challenged. They are armed and they will shoot. It is better you do not venture further than the garden when he visits."

With the Alphas either side of him, Will was reminded of the stories his mother had told him about the Omega royals and how they were always escorted by two of the strongest Alphas in the kingdom, who would willingly give up their lives to protect their charge. With the brothers occasionally slipping into Lithuanian, they quickly translated, never intentionally leaving Will out of the conversation and the inclusion made him feel special. As they reached the lake Will felt a calm assurance and he breathed deeper. The trees which screened the lake on two thirds cloaked the area, giving it the illusion of privacy and exclusivity and in his mind's eye Will could see himself fishing with his father from a small boat.

Can I fish here?" he asked Hannibal who gave a shrug.

"Of course, when father and Donald are here, I would prefer you do not fish alone. It is too secluded."

Valdas placed a hand on Will's shoulder. "Next time I'm here, you and I will go searching for trout. We hook them and Hannibal can cook them. A deal?"

Will grinned. "A deal."

You enjoyed your walk." Robert called out to them as they made their way to the house, a table had been placed on the edge of the manicured lawn with Robert sitting next to Donald, behind them two agents set several feet apart, standing motionless like bookends. As the trio took their places around the table, Will felt a glow as Hannibal indicated the Omega should take the seat next to him. Sitting around the table with the Alphas, the conversation flowing easily between the men, Will felt socially inept and was content with listening until Donald threw the curve ball at him.

"I was intrigued with what you said yesterday, Will, that you can't become an FBI agent because Omegas are barred. I know they can work behind the scenes but my understanding is Omegas never apply to become agents." Donald's face was kind, reminding Will of the teachers he had encountered in New Orleans when Will had told them he wanted to be a county sheriff.

"Omegas can't become agents because they can't pass the psychological evaluation. It's impossible."

"How is it impossible?" Donald gave Robert a look, both men possessing a wealth of information between them and finding an absence of knowledge regarding one of their favourite topics of conversation, they were intrigued.

"People believe most Omegas can only kill in self defence, so the rare ones who kill outside that remit are always labelled psychopaths. Part of the FBI evaluation centres around whether you can use deadly force. If a candidate answers no they're rejected. If an Omega answers yes, they are deemed a psychopath. The FBI don't hire psychopaths. Damned if you do and damned if you don't."

"You think it's deliberate?" Donald asked

"I think it's convenient." Will chose his words carefully.

"It's about time you did something, uncle." Zeller remarked joining the group as he pulled out a chair and sat next to his father.

"It's on my agenda." Donald replied

Zeller addressed Will. "We just kid ourselves it's fairer for Omegas. The FBI aren't the only ones who stack the rules against them. Four years ago Omegas were allowed to attend medical school. Soon as the doors are opened to them, the rules change so Alphas can be fast tracked. People like Alana and I got through the training quicker and grabbed the best residencies."

"Then explain why you are still in the Emergency Room." Robert sighed

"I like it, dad. Having an uncle who was the best surgeon in the States limited my field, he's a hard act to follow. Besides I'm happy."

"You must have some observations, Will, coming from the south to the north." Donald asked

"No, er not really." Will felt horrified as he noticed the audience's attention had swung to him.

"As an Omega, Will, you must have some opinion." Donald persisted trying to draw the boy out.

Will glanced at Hannibal whose blank expression didn't give him any indication how to respond.

Will spoke tentatively. "In the north, Omegas just accept everything, that's why we call them the pretenders. Pretending to be Beta. People don't know what it's really like south. They make assumptions. Paint us as defenceless. Sure, we can't vote, have to get off the sidewalk to let an Alpha pass by but we're not without teeth. There's many an Alpha rapist weighted, face down in a swamp somewhere. We call it southern justice." Will looked up at the Alphas around the table. "Sorry."

"You don't believe the northern Omegas campaign hard enough." Donald asked finding the boy's response refreshingly honest.

"They just settle. They expect someone else to tilt the playing field in their direction."

"But you can't vote in the south, Will, surely you can't think it's better." Alana said as she came within earshot, accepting Zeller's offer of his chair.

"We can vote in Florida and we voted to stay south." Will shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"You can't defend their ignorance, surely." Alana tossed back her hair. "They are indoctrinated by traditionalism. To worship mother nature. Brought up to believe their role is to serve Alphas, to be bred and sexually abused."

"We don't worship nature, Alana, we respect it." Will shook his head, frustrated at her lack of understanding.

"It wasn't until I travelled to Florida that I realised there is a lot of hostility between the Omegan community and the Beta, the hostility coming from the Omegas." Robert said steering the conversation away from Alana. "Much of this stems from the Beta Health Council decisions made nearly one hundred years ago. Feelings still run high today."

"We hold grudges in the south. Family feuds go on for years." Will acknowledged.

"Do you hold any animosity towards Betas, Will? After all they initiated one of the vilest campaigns ever known in this country. Stripped Omega duals of the right to be called male, to be called Omega."

"I don't hate anyone, Alana." Will felt the old familiar panic start to rise, wishing the talk would stop. "Just pleased Aaron Sutcliffe was on hand to put things right."

"He was a great man, Will. You would have liked him." Robert saw the anxious look on the Omega's face. "Anyway, I think we've grilled you enough for one day, Will."

"You really need to join one of the Omegan support groups. I know your education has been piecemeal and it can't have helped living in that fossil factory better known as the sanctuary but if you joined a group it would broaden your vocabulary and your debating skills would be less naive." Alana smiled

Will felt his face burn and heard a quick "Alana" in admonishment from Robert.

"You think I sound immature?" Will's voice sounded weaker than intended.

"You sound limited." she said. "It's not your fault, Will. Brought up by Chilton would have hampered anybody's education. He is somewhat stifling and unimaginative."

"Excuse me." Will pushed his chair back from the table, standing up, wanting to escape.

"Will." Hannibal's voice was firm and he gave a small shake of his head and Will knew he was being instructed to stay. Feeling trapped, he felt his heartbeat quicken and momentarily debated his next move before returning to his seat, bowing his head and clasping his hands together in his lap.

Will enjoyed laying on his bed embracing the solitude. He had walked to the water's edge, climbed into the small boat, set the engine running until reaching the middle of the lake. He listened to the birds in the distance and to his father's voice advising him on the best bait to use. Frederick had joined them and his father was soon convulsed into a spasm of laughter by his friend's droll remarks.

He had remained at the table as instructed by the Alpha but behaved Omegan style, head bowed, eye contact minimal, the natural mode for self defence. They had tried to engage him into conversation, his silence noticeable, but Will shielded himself. He had relied on his "aw shucks" country boy routine, his old accent coming to the fore, using his lack of worldliness as a ploy to misunderstand the question, compelling them to dumb down. Hannibal gave no verbal signs of his frustration but his scent had become stronger, more wood than musk. He had forced Will back into the game and the boy, more determined than ever, would not abide by the rules. Alana finally gave way, leaning forward and patting his hand, her voice soft and gentle.

"I'm sorry, Will, if I upset you. I didn't mean for you not to talk."

Will saw the trap as soon as she had finished speaking. She had to appear as his saviour, soothe the Omega and bring him back into the fold. She would encourage him to converse, make allowances for his missteps and watch him respond, as all Omegas did to her altruism, with shy gratitude. His eyes, much darker and unsmiling, reached into hers and he saw a slight confusion cross her face.

"You didn't upset me, Alana, it's just difficult talking with strangers, I guess I say stupid things." Will's reply was lightly salted with sarcasm.

"We are not strangers. We are your family now." Hannibal's interjection had caught Will off guard and he stayed silent knowing if he contradicted the Alpha's remarks, it would be seen as a sign of disrespect.

The two taps on his door had brought him back to reality and with it the knowledge Hannibal had sought him out.

"It's open." Will called out then heard the door open then close.

"Are you sulking, Will?" Will mentally gave credit to Hannibal for his directness.

"I've a headache."

"Brought on by today's events. Did you wish for me to defend you against Alana's words?"

Will pushed himself up and swung his legs around. Grabbing one of his shoes off the floor, he loosened the laces and put it on. "Nope, just wished you hadn't made me stay."

"You would have preferred to run away from a petty remark."

Will let out a deep sigh. "Where I come from being called stupid isn't petty."

"She did not say you were stupid, Will, just inexperienced. If you felt wronged you should have found a rejoinder." Hannibal's voice was flat and was beginning to irritate the Omega.

"You had me at a disadvantage. I told you I wasn't used to socialising. Oh no, I forgot, this is all Frederick's fault." Will picked up for his other shoe, keeping his back to the Alpha.

"I am afraid Alana is not always diplomatic but that does not excuse your sullenness."

"I was quiet, not sullen and nothing I said made that happen. It was your sister's fault." Will pushed his foot into the shoe and began to tie the laces.

"I would appreciate if you would look at me rather than have me talk to your back."

Will twisted slowly at the waist and stared at the Alpha. "You came looking for me, Hannibal. You're the one who brought this up when I was trying to get a handle on it. I came up here to relax, it's my way of coping."

"I apologise Will if that was truly your intention but you were sullen. You were pretending to be something you are not, ill educated, not knowing the simplest terms, a very commendable and effective strategy if it had not been used against my family. I will not have them upset."

"Your family? What about my family, Hannibal? Frederick has been my guardian for the last four years. Do you think we're not close? He was my dad's friend, he helped me." Will's voice trailed off as the emotion set in.

"Again, I apologise. I was not trying to alienate you from those at the sanctuary. It was an attempt to reassure you that you are under our protection."

"I'm sorry if I misunderstood, Hannibal, but I'm always going to fight back. It's in my nature now, it's how I survived."

"I would not have it any other way." Hannibal walked around the bed and sat next to Will. The Omega, frozen in place by the surprise move, allowed himself to be turned around by the Alpha and felt the powerful hands on his shoulders kneading the muscles.

"This is the best method to relieve a tension headache." Hannibal's voice was smooth against his ear and with his head lolling back and skin prickling from the touch, Will fought hard to keep from moaning.

Will regretted offering to help Bedelia the moment he pulled out the first box. With her car positioned as near to the garage as possible, it still meant a short walk.

"What have you got in here?" he asked as he tried to make lifting the box look easy.

"Crockery, kitchen utensils, some tinned goods." she mused watching his face for any sign of discomfort. "Are you sure you can carry them?"

Will waddled to the car and placed the load into the trunk before allowing himself to laugh. "if I can't, how could you?"

Bedelia grumbled. "If everyone hadn't been in such a rush this morning, Valdas and Hannibal would have been doing this."

"I don't mind. It's for a good cause." Will pulled out another container and found it lighter. He looked inside to see soaps, toothpaste and various brands of shampoos.

"It is so disheartening when people discard items they have hardly touched. The clinic can make use of them and they are not concerned if they are not in pristine condition." She waited till he returned from the car before broaching the subject.

"Robert and I are sorry about Alana's behaviour yesterday. I would have spoken to you earlier but Hannibal suggested it would be better to approach you in the morning."

"I was gonna make up with her last night but she wasn't about." he said wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"She was still smarting from Hannibal's rebuke, he can be very forceful when angry. Her ill-mannered attitude and rudeness towards you was something he would not tolerate."

"Oh" Will said quietly in response.

He saw the car pull into the driveway and heard Bedelia mutter under her breath.

"Smile, Bedelia." She told herself, only faintly aware of the look Will's was giving her. "Carry on with the loading, Will, I will deal with them."

By the time Will had picked up another box and returned to the car the conversation was in full flow, the group standing a few feet away from the Honda.

"We were delayed, dreadful matter, a member of the orchestra was murdered. We were interviewed by the police. Of course, we knew him, I explained, we know most of the artists

in Baltimore. Toby rehearsed with him the other week but it didn't make us bosom buddies." As the shorter Alpha wittered on, the pitch of his voice rose. Will suspected this was the highlight of the man's week, a man who enjoyed the drama, the gossip.

Bedelia took the pamphlets being offered by the rotund Alpha and motioned towards Will, "Franklyn, this is Will Graham, my son-in-law."

"Of course, Hannibal's mate." He held out his hand to Will who grasped it. Expecting a strong handshake, Will was surprised when he received something more Omegan, a slight grip, the merest of contact before the hand was withdrawn. Franklyn stepped back, crossing his arms in front of his chest and inspected Will. "My, you are something special, no wonder Hannibal snapped you up."

Will immediately ducked his head, feeling his face flush. "And on the shy side, makes a change from Hannibal's previous liaisons." Franklyn nodded his approval. "I take it this young man will be at the Gathering."

"Naturally. Will, this is Senator Franklyn Froideveaux and Mr Budge." Will felt like an object rather than a person, standing there speechless, not used to small talk and was grateful for the excuse to leave when Bedelia said. "Will, the boxes, please"

He made his final trip to the garage picking up the box, heavier than the last and struggled as he tried to fit it in the trunk of the car alongside the others.

"Let me help." Budge was next to him before Will could reply. Will felt the Alpha's hand purposely touch his skin, with a leisurely brush of his arm, as between them they adjusted the position of the box. As Will looked to thank him, he saw the man's eyes on him, an amused smile on his face.

"I am at your call if you ever need assistance for any of your needs ." The Alpha's voice was low as he drew his head back and when Will saw the nostrils flare, he knew his Omegan scent was being flavoured.

"Thanks." Will mumbled, hurriedly returning to where Bedelia was standing.

Budge enunciated as he strode back to Franklyn, the smaller man making Budge appear taller when they were side by side. "There was a time when Alphas would fight to the death to win an Omega especially one of great beauty and purity."

"Thankfully, those days have gone and Will's affections have already been won." Bedelia's voice had a sharpness to it.

"A prize may be won but not always claimed." Budge's eyes fixated on Will, who felt uncomfortable under the stare and shifted from one foot to the other. Even the Omega novice knew a breach of protocol when unashamedly displayed.

Will sensed a power play in motion when Bedelia took one step forward, then one sideways, exhibiting her authority over Will by placing herself directly in front of him. "It has been a pleasure, Mr Budge, Franklyn, but if you will excuse me, I have duties to perform."

"Yes, of course, I can see you're busy." Franklyn retreated with Budge departing more slowly, giving Bedelia a nod of the head, before heading towards their vehicle.

As the car left the driveway, Will heard Bedelia take in a quick deep breath and felt a twinge of apprehension when she announced.

"I will wait until Robert returns home before leaving. I'd prefer you were not left alone."

Chapter 19

Will couldn't suppress the giggle. "So this guy thought Omegas would all turn into muscle men by playing football."

Robert nodded. "Apparently he didn't understand basic Omegan biology, thought only female Omegas went into heat."

"Aw, come on." Will laughed. "So how would I have fitted into his universe?"

Robert chuckled. "I think he would have had serious difficulties trying to find a place for you. Probably believed you were a myth, like the unicorn. At least he paved the way for Franklyn. Franklyn took the basic idea and substituted music scholarships in place of sports scholarships and the preliminary studies show it has been a success. More and more Omegas from this scheme are going to college or university. The problem as always lies with funding so Franklyn has decided to showcase some of the children at various functions to promote the scheme. Hence his visit."

"And this Gathering?"

"It's a bi-annual social event held at Sutcliffe house where members of the Du Maurier and Sutcliffe family gather. Aaron Sutcliffe organised them as a thank you for all the support he received during his election campaigns and they have been held ever since. My first was a nightmare. Kade's relatives attended en masse, her mother was a Bloom, a rather famous or should I say infamous Omega family from Virginia. They were all rather too chatty for my liking."

"I'm not sure....." Will's voice trailed off.

"It's not for several weeks, so there's plenty of time to find an excellent excuse not to attend."

"Have you ever done that?"

"Sadly no, I'm too afraid of my wife to try."

Will was laughing again and Robert took pleasure seeing the Omega enjoy himself. "William, do not be afraid to approach me. If you have any questions I will always attempt to provide an answer. I can see by your face you are now debating whether or not to ask me something. Please feel free."

"Why did Valdas and Hannibal go back to Lithuania? When they were older, yeah, but fourteen was kinda young."

Robert shrugged. "Their grandfather, Aaron Sutcliffe was a much beloved president and the public affection transferred to Donald and Bedelia. Our children would have grown up under the spotlight of the media, especially if they failed to live up to the standards expected from descendants of a much exalted president. Valdas and Hannibal were both exuberant as

children and we believed it was in their best interest to live with my brothers during those formative years."

"Must have been hard for both of you."

"We knew there was a risk that one or both may not return, but nothing shameful has followed them through to adulthood and any minor mishaps have long been forgotten. I am very proud of them, proud of all my children."

Will didn't mind being babysat by Robert. He was a mine of information regarding the house and the Du Mauriers on which he freely conversed as he took Will on a guided tour of the house. The Du Mauriers had been financiers, Will had learned, and also boasted two presidents, Louis Du Maurier and grandson Armand who had both implemented changes to enhance the rights of Omegas. The older part of the house where the main bedrooms were situated had antiquated wall covering and the smell of age but the main bathroom was different, opulent and glorious with brass fittings and large roll top bath, white and gold décor throughout. Will could imagine a Du Maurier soaking in the tub sipping champagne after brokering a successful deal. Downstairs was covered quicker with Will knowing most of the layout. To the left of Hannibal's office were the laundry room and the stairs leading to the basement.

"I'll let Hannibal show you the basement, the stairs are somewhat troubling for my knees." Robert said excusing himself.

Showing Will the lower floor facilities, toilet, basin and shower, he announced "*The boys when young once washed a goat in there."* as if such events where common in the house. With Valdas and Hannibal, Will had thought, anything was possible. They exited a door then walked along a narrow walkway to a glass atrium style swimming pool which Robert encouraged Will to use. Through the glass panelling Will could see a dilapidated greenhouse, windows broken and large spindly growth of long forgotten plants growing on the inside.

"Mr. Foster, senior, was the gardener till his passing. His son and grandsons maintain the grounds and stables but with their own business expanding, the greenhouse became a casualty due to lack of time on their part."

"Could I take it on, have it as a project? It's a shame to see it go to ruin." His father's waste not want not routine was firmly instilled in Will.

"It would be good to see it put to some use. You obviously are someone who likes to keep busy." Robert said and Will, for the first time, began to wonder exactly how he would be spending his days.

Resuming the tour inside the house, Robert waved his hand in the direction of an oak door. "My inner sanctum better known as my office."

The staff consisted of two domestics and one housekeeper, all Betas. Will could visualise Jimmy rolling his eyes at the Alpha's use of the word staff. "Mrs. Brady is also our cook as well as housekeeper and has been advised of your dietary requirements." The warm handshakes and smiles from the women made Will feel further at ease.

"There is also a little Omega girl who visits every Friday to clean our bedroom and my study, but unfortunately her name has slipped my mind." The housekeeper whispered "*Lisa* " and Will could see the ease which Robert had received the prompt, suggesting a relaxation of boundaries between the employer and employee.

Returning to the hallway, Will hesitated before speaking, looking down at his shoes. "Frederick said he would give you a dossier. I know you've been busy, not had time to read it." He paused before continuing. " I need a small room, maybe a large closet, somewhere to meditate, somewhere no one will disturb me."

"I glanced at it quickly but as Dr. Chilton had implied it was intended for the head of the family, I insisted he hand it to Bedelia." Robert joked "But I may have the solution."

As they walked past Will's bedroom he saw the door at the end of the hallway and watched as Robert fiddled with the handle, managing to partially open the door. "Good grief. There's so much jumble in here."

Convincing Robert he could fit through the opening, Will found himself standing on newspapers bundled together, tied with string. At the far end he could see beneath a grimy window, two chairs, boxes and books.

"You better come out, you don't know what may be crawling around in there."
Robert's voice edged towards panic.

"Bugs don't scare me, same with rats and mice. Are you sure I can use it?"

Robert's voice quivered. "You'll be doing us a great service, getting it back in order. If we remove the newspapers together, they are of some importance, then it's all yours."

"Thank you." Will said as he squeezed through the door and the frame. "Are you okay? You look a bit.....er?"

"Claustrophobia. A childhood experience has stayed with me. Not only do I abhor confined spaces but I dislike seeing others in them."

The whooping sounds coming from downstairs filtered upwards.

"I believe my sons have returned home."

Will trailed Robert down the staircase and stopped halfway down the hallway as Hannibal approached with a smile etched across his face. Will mused how different a happy Hannibal looked.

"They made the announcements. I have been awarded the contract for the Omega sector. H T Lecter and associates are part of the rejuvenation of Baltimore."

Robert swept forward and bracketed Hannibal's arms with his hands. "I am so very pleased. I'm delighted. You deserve this." Robert's voice was full of joy, then it broke into laughter. "I do not know what more to say."

"Thank you, father, for believing in me." Hannibal breathed in deeply, looking at his father with unbridled affection.

"Tonight we celebrate." Valdas shouted from where he stood near the kitchen door holding several bags. "Hannibal is cooking."

"When did I become mule man for my brothers." Zeller struggled under the weight of the box he was carrying.

As the group disappeared into the kitchen Will slowly followed, hovering just inside the doorway, and watched as they threw out remarks to each other as the unloaded the supplies.

"Mrs. Brady, I am giving you the rest of the day off, with pay of course, and I will make sure the kitchen is cleaned to your usual high standard after they have finished."
Robert announced , the housekeeper nodding in return, smiling in appreciation.

"See, Han, you don't believe those sayings back home but one has come true. You marry an Omega then you will bring good fortune into the family. Only married for a few days and your wish has come true." Valdas had the same joyful tone as his father.

Hannibal looked over where the Omega stood, then walked towards him. Will felt the heat slowly rise in his face as Hannibal stopped in front of him, placing a hand on his shoulder. "I think my brother could be right." The hand left the shoulder, tenderly placed on the boy's cheek and with the slightest stroke of the face with his thumb, he was gone, returning to the counter.

The news was the lead story on the local channel with pictures of those selected displayed with a brief resume of each successful candidate. Hannibal's picture, suit and tie, clean shaven projected pride and nobility which promoted a smile of satisfaction from Will and the thought *"my Alpha"* bounced around inside his head. He stayed as the others went back to the kitchen with Alana, having returned from work, joining in the fun and laughter but Will was too occupied watching the screen to feel excluded, watching the anchor man announce the death of Douglas Wilson, trombone player.

Will was transfixed as the man spoke to the reporters, the same sturdy stance, the same hat, the same look. "My team are working alongside the Baltimore Police Department."

A mumbled voice from the crowd elicited a further reply. "The scene is still being processed. Until that's completed no more statements will be given."

Another voice off camera and a flash of anger crossed Crawford's face. "No one is saying Chesapeake Ripper. We're done here."

Will watched as the head of the BAU strode away from the throng but Will knew, the lack of excitement in Jack's voice, the weary look of disappointment on Jack's face, Will knew who the killer was not.

Will had fallen in love with his chicken chasseur, with his surroundings and with the Alpha seated next to him. The meat had been filleted, cut into small pieces and it was the extra effort and thoughtfulness on Hannibal's part which nearly made Will tear up. Abel was an excellent cook and Hannibal's dish was on par with any Gideon had produced. For a moment Will was going to use the comparison between the two as a compliment but some small thing inside him whispered the word mistake.

"Will." Valdas spoke louder the second time. "Earth to Will are you with me?"

Will looked up at his brother-in-law mildly confused. "Sorry?"

"I was asking what part of New Orleans you came from, but you were so engrossed in eating, it was difficult to get your attention."

"This is delicious." Will said popping another piece of chicken in his mouth.

"Don't tell the man on your left or his head will get even bigger." Valdas grinned as he reached for a second helping.

Will gave Hannibal a quick glance and saw the smile. "I don't come from New Orleans. I was born and raised in Grahamsville, a town not far from New Orleans."

"Will Graham from Grahamsville, not a coincidence?" Will had gotten used to the way Valdas would ask a question.

"Grahamsville was founded by the Alpha Grahams and the Omega descendants just stayed put."

"So one of the Alpha Grahams just fell in love with a beautiful Omega and the whole family changed dynamic."

Will shook his head. "Winston Graham was the mayor of Grahamsville, an accountant by trade. He heard there was an Omega auction taking place in a nearby town and tried to stop it. When he couldn't, he decided to buy the Omega and set him free. That's how he ended up with Clancy Fortier, an Omega dual. Anyhow he decided to return Clancy to his family and when he arrived at the Fortier homestead he was met with a hail of buckshot. Apparently Clancy was a wild child and the family said if Winston was darned fool enough to buy him, he could keep him."

"So he took him back home and they lived happily ever after?" Valdas asked

"Nope. Winston sent Clancy away to the best schools and when he came back he was a very beautiful, well educated, wild child. Anyways, after a lot of there and back Winston called together all the eligible Alphas in the county and told Clancy he could pick any one of them

to marry and Winston would provide for them financially. Clancy picked Winston and then they lived happily ever after. They had eight kids, four of each dynamic but it was the Omega line which survived."

"Your Clancy sounds like an Almega." Valdas said wiping his mouth with his napkin.

"Never heard of them."

"Did you not have folk tales in the south with regard to Omegas with duality?" asked Robert taking over the reins of the conversation.

"Yeah, some. We're always painted as tricksters, deceivers."

"In Europe duality is associated with changelings. The story of Tadas and Angelius is one of the best known in Lithuania. An Omega kingdom is overrun with monsters and Tadas, a strong and noble Alpha drives these creatures from the land. He falls in love with Angelius, a young Omega with duality and after a long courtship, they marry. The enemy returns, but during battle Tadas is injured and with their defences failing, all hope seems lost. Overwhelmed by the thought of losing Tadas and all the people he loves, Angelius falls into a deep sleep. When he awakens, he looks like an Omega but has the scent of the strongest Alpha, thinks, talks and fights like an Alpha and it is he who faces the monsters and kills them all. When he returns home, the people are fearful of this strange being but when the look inside him, they see he still possesses the Omegan heart of pure gold. Naturally, they all live happily ever after."

"So being an Almega is a good thing?" Will queried

"Not all stories have happy endings. In some when the Almega returns, he clashes with the Alpha over who is the most dominant and either one kills the other or they both die. In other tales the Almega, seduced by his newfound power, embraces the Alphan darkness and becomes a monster himself only to be killed by his beloved."

"I think I prefer the happy ever after version."

"So do I, William, so do I." said Robert

It was as if all the joy had been sucked out of the house. The Lecters had spent the previous day grabbing every bit of quality time with Valdas they could, aware he would soon be leaving. Will had taken a back seat, not resenting that the first days of his married life had centred around another family member but enjoying the warmth and love exuding from everyone.

When the morning came and Bedelia held her son tight, it reminded Will of the hugs his mother used to give whenever he was going to spend time away from home, the kind that

said you were loved, to keep safe and hurry back. As Hannibal carried his brother's cases to the car and the family followed, Valdas motioned Will to his side.

"Protocol says I must learn to treat you as my brother. Don't need to learn, Will, you are my little brother." Will was pulled close and felt the arms encase him, a hand patting his back. When finally released Valdas extracted an agreement. "Next time, you and me fishing. A deal?"

"A deal." Will promised

Will passed the time waiting for Hannibal to return from the airport helping Bedelia. Either emptying closets of surplus clutter or re-arranging the furniture, he could feel her need to do something empty and mindless to fill an emotional void. After three hours, she began to slow down and their occasional chatting became longer meaningful conversations.

He heard Hannibal's voice in the hallway, a flat serious tone and Will felt a sense of dread begin to take him over.

"Will." He looked up at the Alpha in the doorway and moved when he was beckoned to follow. They walked in silence to the office, Hannibal pulling back a chair which Will occupied. Seated the other side of the desk, he placed three books directly in front of the Omega.

"I need you to study the basic principles in business primarily concerning Winstonian Estates. When the time is right I will arrange a meeting with the board as it is important they fully support me. I need to present a case and would like some input from you, giving the Omegan point of view. I am not asking for academic excellence just an honest opinion. I will inspect your work and if there are major differences between your point of view and mine, we will reach a compromise."

"I wouldn't know where to start." Will shifted uncomfortably in the chair, not used to being under the Alpha's gaze.

"The aims of my company and my vision for Baltimore are clearly laid out, the necessary source material is provided." He tapped the journals in front of Will. "I will teach you, Will, and although you have the disadvantage of your dynamic, I will show you how to circumvent those obstacles. I will expect you to learn so as not to waste my time. I will attempt to shape you, but you can not expect to be taken seriously in the business world if you rely on your Omegan pathos. It works no better in the real world than it would work here. You are young and can be trained to avoid getting into bad habits."

"I think I understand." Will doubted his own words as soon as they left his mouth.

"This will be a chance to get to know each other, work side by side. Protocol may have to be observed but not because I desire it, only that polite society will expect it. The time we spend together will enable us to understand each other."

"Yeah, sounds great." Will lied

"Be warned, Will, there will be times when you will feel under pressure and I will give support when asked but I do not appreciate the whining of Omegas or the way they can turn on the tears, preying on the basic instinct of an Alpha to protect them."

His mouth formed an okay but Will didn't have the energy to speak the word, as his brain tried to download all the information directed at him. Will picked up the journals Hannibal pushed towards him then hesitated after standing as if waiting for permission to leave.

"You have a rare opportunity to succeed in an area where very few Omegas venture."

"Yeah, um great."

"And Will, from now on the word is yes not yeah. Do you understand?"

Chapter 20

Will sat between Robert and Hannibal in the office. He had met Mr Dobson several times at the sanctuary and on each occasion the atmosphere was relaxed, here it screamed formality.

"To protect your anonymity I suggest you open a separate account. I have spoken to the treasurer at NOGA and they are willing to deposit an agreed amount each month to your husband's account which would automatically be transferred into your own."

"And there would be no way someone could connect the two accounts."

The bank manager shook his head. "The new account would be in the name of William Lecter, quite legal now you are married. You will have a new name, new address and no transaction will connect you to NOGA. Will, you can have a credit card, use online banking, all those things you have shied away from in the past. It would be perfectly safe and you will still be able to access the accounts in the name of William Graham."

"Yeah, er yes, okay that sounds good as long as the animal shelter and Peter's salary stay the same."

"Nothing in the Graham accounts will be altered. You will just have an additional identity."

Will looked at Hannibal who nodded. "It would appear to be the most sensible solution."

"Okay, er yes, lets do it."

"I have the necessary forms, they just need your signature. I've also had drawn up a power of attorney document, in case you fall ill or if you are incapacitated for some reason, if put in place now it could save a lot of paperwork in the future."

"I thought Frederick took control if anything happened."

"That was before your marriage. It would simplify things. Sometimes when there are more than one interested party, things can get complicated and messy. This will just tidy them up. The obvious choice to control your finances, in certain circumstances, would be your Alpha."

Will glanced towards Hannibal again, feeling adrift without Frederick's guidance. "Yeah, er yes, of course. Where do I sign?"

The irritation had built up inside of Will since early morning. He had been propelled into the meeting, Hannibal informing him over breakfast of the arrangement, having no time to prepare and given scant information other than it involved his finances. He knew as soon as Dobson left something would be said, he had heard a slight sigh emitted from Hannibal immediately Dobson had called Will by his first name.

"We need to lay down rules concerning propriety..."

"He's not calling me Mister anything, Lecter or Graham." Will had snapped. "He's known me since I was fourteen and it is what it's always gonna be. I will call him Mr Dobson and he will call me Will."

"How can you be certain of my words, Will?" An element of surprise was in Hannibal's voice.

"I read people, that's what I do."

He hadn't idled after his minor outburst, simply asked "*Is there anything else? "* and when there was nothing forthcoming, he had returned to the sitting room. Picking up the H T Lecter and associates prospectus, Will settled back into the couch. He began leafing through the contents looking at the photographs, the young Hannibal with his family, the slighter older one studying in Paris, the opening of his Baltimore office surrounded by colleagues and the full centre page spread of the school designed to his high standards in Annapolis. In each he could see a different Hannibal to the one he had seen in his office, a relaxed half smile on his face with his co-workers, a wide smile standing in front of the school. Will had dissected the previous night's conversation, he had been observing the Alpha yet he had not predicted his sudden change of mood. He had easily sensed the others, their strengths and the weaknesses but had only glimpsed a version of Hannibal Lecter. Something inside this Alpha was buried deep and it left Will unsettled.

He first noticed the scent, he hadn't heard footsteps on the hard floors, then became aware the man was standing near the end of the couch.

"I appear to have upset you." The blank statement put Will at a disadvantage, the onus being on Will to respond and expand.

"Mr Dobson has always treated me kindly. I was brought up to respect my elders, so I'm not gonna get all high and mighty and expect him to mister me 'cause I got married." Will found his accent always slipped when tuning into his parents wishes and expectations.

"Then I apologise. I would not wish you to behave in a manner which you consider rude."

"You railroaded me into that meeting. Didn't have time to think, not sure now if I've done the right thing."

"I would apologise for the ambush but then I may be soon apologising again and you will tire of it. It was very much a last minute arrangement. It was not my intention to disorientate you."

"An apology without remorse is valueless, just empty words." The thought floated through Will's head.

"My conversation with you last night may have seemed a little harsh. I am not the kind to sugar-coat my words. I have seen Omegas deliberately humiliated when attempting to compete with Alphas. I do not wish for it to happen to you."

"And you despise their weakness." The ideas crowded their way into Will's head and he tried to shake them out.

"This is all new and I don't want to let you down but the way I treat people in my life, people I already know, ain't gonna change." Will began to mentally charge himself for an argument.

"I agree." Hannibal sat down next to Will and picked up another journal from the floor. "Your parents were very wise to teach you the meaning of respect."

Will sat silently as Hannibal pointed out the key objectives in the Phoenix prospectus, talked about the company's thirty year plan for the future, its passive solar designs, envisioning new energy options and bio mimicry. Will eyes followed Hannibal's hands as he held the document, noting how the man's fingers splayed to support the pages as Will was shown yet another ecological design. The Omega felt miniscule seated next to the Alpha and had to tamp down the urge to rub his neck along the broad shoulder inches from his face, to cover himself in the other's scent.

"It is essential we try to change the public perception of architects. Renewables are integral to any architectural design as is minimising negative environment impact. To use ecological features, use reclaimed lumber and recycled copper over other conductors of metal. To use nature, to plant evergreens to shield houses against cold north winds, encourage urban bio habitats and build low energy houses. It is possible to do all this, Will and still create something of great beauty."

Will just nodded in response knowing when he was completely out of his depth and drank in as much of the brown eyes he could before averting his gaze. "I need to see photographs of the Omega sector before the Baltimore fire to get a feel of the place. Read articles which harness people's memories."

"Good. Good idea, Will, I am glad you are showing some enthusiasm." But it was Hannibal's enthusiastic response which gave Will the pleasurable sensations and he had been willing to continue the discussion just to keep the Alpha close.

It was later, after Hannibal took the call, Will had conceded the Alpha had been correct to use his apologises sparingly. "I am sorry, Will, but an interview with Baltimore Today is too great an opportunity to miss. I will be back in maybe three hours."

He had waited around to see Hannibal leave. With his freshly laundered jeans, black shirt and leather jacket, Will thought he looked more predator than architect but the litheness of the way he moved and the smile he gave Bedelia before leaving, the Omega was certain he would stand out and charm anyone who crossed his path.

He didn't have to utter a word when he returned, it was written all over his face, another apology. "I have to go to New York tomorrow. A meeting with the directors of Phoenix, they are excited about the news. I will be back Saturday and then we may be able to spend some time together."

Will managed a tight lip smile, a couple of nods of the head before returning to the peace and quiet of his bedroom.

Discovering Robert was working in Baltimore that morning, Will had busied himself clearing the room, taking advantage of the man's absence. He had no desire to deal with the possibility of the Alpha having a panic attack should he think Will had become entrapped. It had taken far longer than anticipated to create enough space to open the door fully. He hadn't thought much about Hannibal, until Bedelia told him the Alpha had called to say he had arrived safely. Having managed to push him to the back of his mind for most of the day, the Omega decided he didn't really miss him. By evening he found himself in the sitting room flipping channels on the TV while the rest went about their business. Bedelia had made every effort to keep him company, but Will had convinced her he was happy watching a documentary he had accidentally switched on prior to her arrival and eventually left him alone.

"Mother bought special Omegan milk for you." Zeller watched as Will prepared his routine nightcap of warm milk.

"From special Omega cows no doubt." Will joked.

"It's her way of showing you she cares. Don't worry, you'll get used to us." His brother-in-law assured him.

The night had been different, he had become familiar with some of the noises, the water pump which brought fresh spring water into the house, the banging of the pipes and the filling up of the cisterns. Locking both doors to his bedroom, Will lay awake in nervous anticipation when he thought he heard footsteps on the stairs drawing nearer. Heart thumping and petrified there would be a knock on his door by an unknown hand, with head under his bed covers, Will waded into the stream to stand near his father and Frederick.

By morning, with all his fears evaporated, Will resumed his mission of ridding the room of every item surplus to requirements. He negotiated the chairs down the impossible staircase one at a time and quickly returned from depositing it near the greenhouse. "*The Foster will take them later.*" Bedelia had informed him. The second proved more difficult being larger and by the time he had carried it near the top of the stairs, he heard the distinctive accented voice and the softer voice of Bedelia issuing a reply. He took the load down one step at a time and finally lifting it, he walked awkwardly into the sitting room. Having to wait until Hannibal and Robert moved out of his way and avoid slipping on the death trap of a rug which partially covered the floor, Will felt a rise of anger as he entered the sun room. As Bedelia rose from her chair calling out "*Be careful of the door.*" Will, more motivated than sensible, ignored the warning. Pushing the door open with his foot and halfway through with the furniture, it snapped back forcefully onto the boy's knuckles.

"Shit." He let go of his burden and shook his hand repeatedly trying to rid himself of the pain.

"Will," He saw Hannibal advancing. "Please do not use vulgar language in front of my mother."

Will lowered his head and pretended to concentrate on his hand as the tears welled up in his eyes and his bottom lip began to tremble.

Will stood in the kitchen with his hand in a bowl of warm water, the staff milling round made him feel out of place. Bedelia had left as Zeller entered the room and he stood near the doorway until his curiosity was satisfied. Joining Will he looked down at the boy's hand.

"Fight?"

"Yeah," Will replied "with the sun room door."

He watched as Zeller partially filled a tumbler with bottled water and took out a small container, flipping the lid he tapped two tablets into the palm of his hand.

"Headache?"

"No." Zeller replied "Scent blockers. Alphas working with the public are obligated to take them."

Zeller turned his head slightly towards the doorway as if to listen. "That's mother's annoyed voice. What did Hannibal do?"

Will shrugged. "Just been his normal self."

Will wasn't sullen just generally withdrawn and the Lecters noticed. His hand still bandaged and hurting, he ate his egg scramble slowly, the after effects of the strong pain killers he had been given the previous night had taken away some of his appetite.

"Are you feeling better?" Bedelia had asked.

"Still drowsy." Will managed to reply.

"Not regretting getting married are you Will?" Zeller's joke backfired. The room was filled with silence as an unresponsive Will continued to eat his breakfast.

Hannibal knew he was avoiding the boy. He left the house soon after breakfast and saddled Baron to ride across to the lake. The horse was stronger than most, with a tendency to pull whenever it sensed the need in his rider and Hannibal was glad to wrestle back control to give him a sense of total power over something. His feelings of regret for marrying had resurfaced and he was determined to ride them out of his mind, to try to quash the antagonism he felt toward the Omega. He hadn't walked blind into the arrangement, but neither had he anticipated the rising resentment triggered by the reserved manner of the boy.

The odd spark of rebellion intrigued him but that was soon replaced with the typical Omegan compliance. It was obvious the boy was sexually attracted to him. He could smell the boy's scent changing, see the dreamy look in the grey blue eyes when they sat close Added

to the other typical Omegan mating traits the boy was displaying, Hannibal felt thrown off balance. His mother's rebuke had opened his eyes as to how he was being perceived and now he would have no choice but to rethink his whole strategy.

He returned nearly three hours later and made his way to the sitting room. With the family in their usual seats he went to take his place on the small couch next to Zeller when he noted the absence.

"Where's Will?" He asked casually.

"Sleeping it off. Mother overdosed him on pain med." Zeller's reply was equally casual but the corners of his mouth were turned upward into a smirk.

"I'm sorry, Hannibal, this was all my fault, I was not thinking. I gave Will the same medication we use, but he was so drowsy this morning I checked the bottle It's not recommended for Omegas." Hannibal could hear the anxiety in his mother's voice.

"Is he alright?"

"Just very, very tired. He went straight back to bed after breakfast but I think we need to wake him otherwise he won't be able to sleep tonight." Bedelia replied.

"I will see to him."

"Lots of coffee." Zeller called out as Hannibal left the room. "Doctor's orders."

The boy was laying on his back, left arm resting across his rib cage. Hannibal could see by the rise and fall of his chest. The Omega was deep in sleep and Hannibal almost felt reluctant to wake him from his restful pose. It was the feet that caught his attention first, divested of shoes and socks, he noticed how the Omega's feet were proportionate to his smaller stature. As he drew close, he could see the movement under the closed eyelids and took note of the long black eyelashes. The long neck and the slope of the shoulders looked smooth and inviting, with the left bonding gland at the base of the neck within easy reach.

Hannibal wondered how the boy would react once pressure was applied. A light massage with his thumb in small circular motions would render the boy malleable. A few endearments followed by passionate kissing, the boy would be gasping. Reaching for the upper arm, Hannibal transferred his hand to the dark chocolate curls, taking a lock between his thumb and middle finger, to feel the texture. As Will inhaled deeply, he began to turn his head, seeking out his Alpha. Hannibal bought his hand closer to the face and observed how the Omega rolled his body until his neck made contact with the wrist, moving his head slowly in a slight twisting fashion until he was rubbing against the pulse point.

The stark realisation this wasn't fascination on his part but an act of cruelty made Hannibal pull back. He immediately squeezed the boy's upper arm, shaking it a little at the same time, calling his name. When the Omega opened his eyes all Hannibal could see was the look of pure adoration.

Chapter 21

Hannibal had shone as Will knew he would. The interviewer was smitten from the onset reacting to Hannibal's intelligent sexuality - sex sells Will had read - and the Alpha was vending it wholesale. Whether they knew about architecture or not, Hannibal's use of words drew the viewers in. With his accent moderated, the vocabulary sounded like foreplay and the occasionally angled head and slow nod in agreement kept eyes focused on him, ignoring the others in the group. The camera loved him and he was at his seductive best.

Back at the studio, the woman looked straight ahead when she knew she was on air, her confederate grinning as she shook her head.

"Unfortunately, another of Baltimore's eligible bachelors no longer available but we would like to extend our congratulations to Hannibal Lecter and his partner on their recent marriage. And yes, I will be crying into my pillow tonight."

Will hadn't minded the announcement, his name wasn't mentioned but the unexpected pang of jealousy which reared up as a result of the comments shocked him. *"What the fuck's wrong with you, Graham."* He knew in the past she had done more than just look at his Alpha. He was almost angry when the screen pulled him back and he felt his skin begin to chill.

"Coming up next, the drive to return young Omegas into education using music and the man leading the charge, our own Senator Franklyn Froideveaux."

It wasn't the words, nor the picture of the Senator but the man standing next to him. The intense stare and cruel mouth were in place and Will was compelled to mentally strip away the layers.

"Dinner will be soon." Bedelia had spoken but didn't leave the room, choosing to sit next to Will instead.

Franklyn had been informative and self effacing. His passion when talking about the struggles facing young Omegas was heartfelt.

"His mother was an Omega." Bedelia informed Will, but he already knew. There was air to Alphas born to Omega carriers which was always evident. Gentleness. The interviews with the musicians were standard, except of course, Budge.

"It is important we give back to society. The sensitivity of Omegas allows for greater creativity." Lip service, thought Will until the finale. *"A composer who shuns the limelight. Hoping to emulate his originality. When he steps from the shadows his unaltered genius will be acknowledged worldwide. My most inspired performances have been in Leipzig, Lyon, Milan and now, Baltimore."*

Little said, but what was held importance. Head pulled back, eyes shining, mouth twisted - Budge was defiant, magnificent and coded. It was an inside joke and Budge was laughing at everyone, knowing only a few understood the language he spoke. Will did.

"I am beginning to see you now."

"He has the most coldest eyes I have every seen." Bedelia whispered, sounding almost afraid Budge could hear them.

"Mirrors his soul." Will replied

Will had done his homework well and had digested all the information Hannibal had provided on the Baltimore fire. As Bedelia related her story, he could see her account sliding next to the myriad of stories now resident in his head, creating a larger narrative.

"We heard the explosions around eleven o'clock. I remember Zeller then Alana rushing into my bedroom frightened. We went downstairs and turned on the news channel which is where we first received information."

"I was in Paris at the time on business." Said Robert. "Valdas and Hannibal had travelled there from Lithuania so we could spend some time together. A colleague knew I was from Baltimore and when he heard the news, knocked on the hotel room door and made me aware. It is the not knowing that eats away, I knew Bedelia would not have taken the children into the city at that time of night but your mind creates all kinds of scenarios to make that happen."

Bedelia continued. "We could see the flames and the black smoke. Even the weather had been against us, it had been the driest summer on record so there was no resistance to the fire. Material from the explosion deposited on rooftops igniting them and the high winds fanned them even higher. At one point on the edge of the city, a fire whirl appeared, a spinning vortex which destroyed everything in it's past. The Omega sector which was the oldest part of the city was devoured. It took four days to completely extinguish the fire, by which time nothing was left."

"And they still don't know what caused the ship to explode?" Will asked

"It was carrying ammonium nitrate so it is possible it was badly stored." Robert explained. " Rumour had it they were carrying illegal weapons also, but they were only rumours. Nothing of the ship remained which could give clues to this disaster. Even today, many Omegas believe it was not an accident. Prior to this terrible event there had been a huge debate as to whether certain sections should be closed. Senator Harland Tier who had always supported Omegan causes had given a speech condemning the widespread acceptance of prostitution in that part of the city. He labelled it as a seedbed for moral corruption and infectious diseases. Feelings were running high."

"Then they compounded the disaster by discharging patients from the hospitals who were infected with the Omegan influenza virus to make way for the emergency cases. Donald took in some Omega families, two weeks later Cassie and Nicholas were dead. Kade somehow survived but it always weighed heavily on her." Bedelia added

"Three hundred and seventeen people died due to the fire." Robert said.

"Mostly Omegas."

"Yes, William, mostly Omegas."

The letters arrived Wednesday morning. The bank had been quick implementing the changes to his accounts and for the first time in his life he held his own credit card and gave out a little whoop. He hadn't taken much notice of the outside of the second, just a standard business envelope but as he pulled out the paper folded in half and read, he was overcome with a familiar sick feeling. The bold type was immediately noticable, the meaning of the words seconds later.

YOU FILTHY FUCKING WHORE was enough for the first course and Will closed his eyes taking a couple of deep breaths before digesting the rest. Even though it was an unimaginative repetition of abuse, his hands were shaking.

He had halfway convinced himself to throw it away when the little nagging voice of doubt in his head called Frederick Chilton pointed out the folly in his decision. If something happened to someone close because of this, Will would never forgive himself. He walked slowly down the hallway and waited after knocking twice on the door. He was surprised when the door opened instead of permission to enter being called out. Hannibal gave him an amused look and Will felt a surge of relief the Alpha had decided to work from home after Bedelia impulsively joined Robert on the trip to San Francisco.

"You do not have to knock, Will."

Will followed him into the room and lay the sheet of paper on the desk. "Better not touch it, in case it's needed for evidence. Guess someone is unhappy you're no longer single."

Hannibal leaned on the desk, hands either side of the paper and took his time reading. Will wondered at first if he was having difficulty deciphering some of the "vulgar" language, as he would probably call it, but when he finally lifted his head, Will could see distress.

"I am sorry, Will, you should not have been subjected to this vile abuse."

"Not the first time I've been called a whore, been called a whole lot worse." Will regretted sounding flippant and rectified it. "Wouldn't have bothered you except things like this can escalate."

"You believe someone who is infatuated with me could be responsible."

"I'm not sure if they just hate duals or they hate me in particular. If it's latter it would tie in with you. I've never received these kinds of letters before. Saying my scent is rancid, it's too personal, I think they've met me."

"It is small comfort but this coward is using their obscurity to intimidate you. Words can damage but it is best not to let these things enfeeble you."

Will laughed out loud. "You sound like my dad, at least how my dad used to sound before he flipped out over something that was said about me."

"He heard you were being abused."

"Kind of. After we moved to New Orleans, we joined a swim club, it was mixed. I was a good swimmer in spite of my size and this kid, an Alpha, sixteen maybe he.. er picked on me, said I was a girl. One day in the locker room he pulled down my pants to show I was different. I was eleven. No one helped me, guess they were too afraid. Anyhow, my sister, Georgia she found out. She was only a couple of years older and not much bigger than me, but she went after this boy and hit him" Will smiled at the memory "with a baseball bat. Fractured his arm. You know my dad used to call her his little lioness and I figured it was on account of her hair, she was blonde where we were all dark, but it wasn't. She was courageous. Got her killed in the end."

Hannibal was mesmerized by the boy's story, hands in both pockets Will would pull one out every so often and gesticulate, his eyes flickering from the Alpha to the desk.

"Anyhow the coach called the families in and this boy's father, an Alpha redneck, he wasn't gonna listen. There was no blame on his son. The coach, well , he kinda suggested this boy was attracted to me and this redneck, he just went crazy. Said it was all down to me, that duals were dirty little whores who spread their legs and let men pay them, you know, suck the dick to taste the slick." Will looked at Hannibal to gauge the Alpha's reaction and when satisfied he wasn't offended, continued talking. "My dad kinda flipped out, just flew at this guy and started punching him. Took the coach and two officials to pull him off. After that it kinda went away, nobody bothered me again. Guess they were scared of the crazy Omegas."

"What happened to your sister?"

"Georgia? She escaped from the house where we were held. Georgia said that after Hobbs had used her, he'd have no use for me. They tracked her down to some woods. She got shot, shot in the back. She crawled into a ditch, covered herself with brushwood and waited to die." Will's voice broke with emotion and he brushed away the tears. "Hunters found her in the spring, what was left. She had a notebook, wrote everything down, they found it on her. She wrote about me, begged someone to save me and that's how the FBI found out about Hobbs.

Will finally changed position and looked out of the window. "Don't know why I'm telling you this?"

"You feel threatened and your mind is accessing memories where you are under the protection of people you trusted and loved."

"They've not been here a while, got used to looking out for myself."

Hannibal moved from the desk and stood directly in front of the boy. "I am leaving for Sutcliffe house in one hour and would like you to accompany me."

"I'll be fine on my own. I'm used to taking care of myself." Will insisted

"I disagree. In these circumstances, leaving you alone would make me uncomfortable. Besides I would enjoy the company. Your company, Will."

Will spent most the next hour meticulously cleaning his shoes, much to Hannibal's amusement. Even when Will explained it would be considered ill-mannered if he visited the home of another Omega in dirty footwear, Hannibal considered the amount of time and effort Will had put into this duty excessive.

"They look brand new." The Alpha said as Will insisted on adding a few more finishing touches to them. Their conversation had been not much more than small talk during the drive, but Will had snuggled into the seat of the Bentley feeling safe and content with his Alpha at the wheel.

Kade stood at the top of the stairs to greet them, with her step-son standing off to one side. Although this had been his father's house, Donald afforded his Omega mother every respect by treating her as the head of the household. Behind stood a familiar figure and Will stopped the wisecrack before it left his mouth.

"You know my bodyguard, don't you Will. Matty, come and say hello."

Will just stopped himself from bursting into laughter. "Yeah, I know Matty."

"Mr Graham, sir." Matthew gave a curt response.

"Come on, Matty, you know William, you can call him by his first name."

Will climbed the stairs behind Hannibal and as he passed the agent he heard Matthew whisper. "Hello, Willy."

Sutcliffe house looked warm, open and friendly, the opposite of the Du Maurier home. With stone pillars on either side of the porch and wide steps leading up to the door, it reminded Will of a Greek temple. Unlike most houses he had encountered, it was as big on the inside as the outside with eight bedrooms, four bathrooms separate facilities and with one of the largest dining rooms in the county. After encountering two security checks just to get into the grounds, Will decided after seeing the house, it was well worth the indignity of being patted down twice.

"Don't want them to be overcome on the day." Franklyn had said when he caught up with them in the library, leaving the group of children and teachers in the garden. "Performing in front of the President they are going to need lots of rehearsal to steady their nerves."

If Will knew they were going to be present he doubted he would have agreed to accompany Hannibal. Franklyn, the musicians, the whole bundle had arrived soon after Will had seen the interior of the house and although Franklyn had been the only one to approach them, Will guessed if this man was present then the other would be close at hand, directing everything behind the scenes. After adjusting his position, he could see Budge further back from the group surveying the territory.

It was a good day for Kade, Will discovered, as they sat around the garden benches. Will was enthralled as the older Omega recanted her days as First Lady. Her own brand of earthy humour often peppered the stories. She had insisted Will try the home made lemonade and as soon as it touched his taste buds, he understood why.

"It's just like my moms."

"Only use traditional Omega recipes." she smiled "None of that Beta crap."

"Mother." Donald exclaimed

"Donnie worries too much about what people say about me. I'm just the same as I've always been, no airs, no graces. I grew up on a ranch, learned how to ride and shoot, ate good old fashioned home cooking and did chores. People today are just too picky and too damned precious."

With the children dismissed for the day, Franklyn and his musical entourage made their way to the benches to say their farewells. Donald was in his element, his love of music renowned, he enjoyed talking with those whose talents he admired. Will kept his head low, even when Hannibal was at his side and not receiving yet another important phone call, the proximity of Budge jangled his nerves.

"So you are going with new compositions." Donald buzzed with interest.

Franklyn grinned. "Can't keep anything from you, Donald. Just one, a tribute to a special lady. We are planning to include some of the lesser known Omegan composers. Tobias has found some very interesting scores."

"Anyone I've heard of?"

"I am particularly impressed with Bellini, Journos and Gerard, they have inspired me. Determined my path." Tobias spoke with precision as if every word uttered was significant.

The names sounded familiar but Will resisted looking at Budge, seeing the pitcher empty he saw his excuse. "Is there any more lemonade?"

"In the kitchen, Will." Kade patted his hand. "I can send ....."

"No, no, I can get it." He twisted from his chair and headed towards the house.

Donald watched as Will moved quickly across the lawn almost skipping and envied the boy's youth. He liked the Omega and liked the way Kade had taken to him, no longer confusing him with the little boy they had both lost. He hadn't taken much notice of the request but saw Budge move away from them and looked to Franklyn for an answer.

"He needs the facilities." Donald looked to the man striding towards his destination almost military style, the body tight and corded. An uneasiness slowly stirred inside.

"Matthew." One word was all that was needed for the Beta to look at him then Sutcliffe inclined his head towards the house and Budge. Matthew closed his eyes briefly in acknowledgement and left the group.

Will cupped some of the running cold water into his hands and splashed it onto his face. It was warm outside but he also needed to be grounded, this being an easier method than hitting his head against a wall. The smell hit him and knowing he wasn't alone, he turned off the

water and waited for the other to strike. He heard the breathing getting louder, then two footsteps followed by another deep breath.

"Did you just smell me?" Will turned around, back against the kitchen counter.

"Your essence is divine, one may say almost heavenly. Potent."

Will shook his head. "Hey, I'm married and I don't think this follows protocol." Will wanted to laugh at Budge, tell him to go fuck himself but he sensed one wrong move and the Alpha's elegant hands would be wrapped around his throat choking the life out of him. The familiar voice broke the spell.

"Do you need help, Will?" Matthew moved just inside the kitchen.

"Yeah, yeah, can't find a thing." Will waited for Matthew to get closer before he attempted to edge away. He heard Budge inhale one more time, slightly bow, then leave. Once the footsteps died away Will relaxed.

He hadn't wanted to return, was happy to stay in the Bentley until the talking ended but Matthew promised to be at his side. He took the end seat using Hannibal as a shield, leaning back so any looks his way couldn't avoid the Alpha by his side. With the names inside his skull moving around like eels through reeds, his brain latched onto Journos and the book inside his head slowly opened, the writing clearly visible. His eyelids became heavy, unable to resist, he closed them momentarily and when they opened, he was staring directly at Budge.

"There you are, I can see you now."

The man stood upright, shoulders back as if permanently on parade. His head tilted slowly when Donald spoke reminding Will of a hawk searching for prey, but it was the eyes which drew his attention. For the briefest of moments Will saw through them, saw how he viewed others, himself and the familiar knot of fear began to tighten in his stomach, his throat constricting until he broke his gaze. The man was hiding in plain sight, a brooding sub satanic presence unseen by all except one. The Omega uncloaking the biggest predator in the arena, the ultra violent killer standing in their midst. When he looked back he saw Budge had his eyes fixed on him. Until that moment Will had felt a modicum of safety, now with Budge studying him, Will knew, he too was exposed. Something in his face had given him away.

Will was already awake when the commotion started. He could hear the women's voices in the distance, feet scurrying up the stairs. The knocking on Hannibal's door made Will sit upright and he listened to the muffled conversation conveying a sense of urgency.

"I will deal with it. Please do not touch anything." Hannibal had called out.

Will listened to the hurried movement with drawers rapidly opening then closing, the opposite of the Alpha's usual routine.

Will climbed out of bed and pulled on his jeans, scooping up the tee shirt he had worn yesterday, roughly dragging it over his head. His heart was beating faster, the ambience of the house was different, he knew something was amiss. Will heard Hannibal leave his room and padded barefoot after him down to the lower floor. On reaching the hallway the smell hit him, his instincts reacting to the scent of another Alpha, forced him to stop. He hoped that it wouldn't be there but as the door was opened he could see the head of a pig placed on the step. He had seen this before, in the photographs of ancient rituals, and recoiled in shock. The eyes would have been gouged out, the testicles ripped off and forced in the mouth and by placing the symbol at the entrance of an Alpha's home was a decree of intention, his Omega had been claimed and would be taken by a rival. Hannibal slammed the door shut and moved slowly to where Will was standing.

"It is nonsense, Will, stupid medieval nonsense."

"It's real." Will shouted "It's there."

Hannibal moved quick, grabbing Will by his arms. "Will, I made a promise to protect you and I keep my promises."

Will couldn't control his shaking or crying and cursed himself for his weakness. "Please don't let them take me again."

Hannibal pulled him in close, holding the Omega tight to his chest. "You are married, Will, no one else can claim you. You have already been claimed by me."

Chapter 22

Disloyal seemed to be the appropriate term to Matthew as some of the words which left his mouth appeared to lay the blame at Will's feet.

"He followed Mr Graham into the kitchen, was standing close behind him and seemed to be inhaling, sir." Sutcliffe was canny and Matthew knew by the tone of the questions, the President was already in possession of the answers.

"I was informed about incidents concerning some agent's behaviour at the wedding. Have you any intel?"

Matthew wanted to shrug it off but this was Sutcliffe's home, many of the staff had worked for the family for years and any rumours were always passed up to their commander in chief, Donald Sutcliffe.

"At the wedding a few agents suggested they became aroused when standing too close to Mr Graham even though they had taken their blockers, sir."

"And you? Have you been affected by Will's scent."

Matthew hated how he was going to answer. "I'm a Beta, sir, I'm not affected by scents, but Mr Graham's is noticeable."

"Does it affect you sexually?"

Matthew's face contorted into embarrassment. "No, sir, I don't think of him in that way. I consider Will to be a friend."

Donald had acted after Hannibal's early morning phone call. There had been a clear understanding when Donald had decided to seek public office an "*attack on the one was an attack on them all*" policy would come into effect. Hannibal's call had placed Donald on DEFCON 3. With no spouse or children for the press to feast upon, the Lecters would always be in the crosshairs by virtue of being the President's closest family and they could ill afford the press reporting their Omega had been ritually claimed. Despite support for Omegan independence by modern Alphas, there still existed an unwritten "hands off" rule once an Omega married an Alpha. To ignore the rule was to suffer potential violent consequences. He knew the claiming ritual was nonsense as had Hannibal, but whatever crazy had made the threat might not be of the same frame of mind. Past experience had marked them and Donald's memory of Bedelia being attacked by one of her patients was a constant reminder of their vulnerability.

The Lecters had played fair by Donald by keeping their hands clean - no scandals, no ostentatious behaviour, even Hannibal kept his pants zipped up as to not sully Sutcliffe's image but the prompt action had not entirely been to protect Will. Donald hadn't been the only one to notice the look Budge had given the young Omega, hadn't been the only one to query Budge moving so soon after the Omega had left the bench. He had only caught his

nephew's expression for a millisecond but it was enough for him to send Matthew into motion to diffuse the situation. Hannibal's face may have been a mask of congeniality but his eyes were ablaze. Having seen, just the once, Hannibal's volcanic temper erupt, Donald did not want to witness a repeat performance.

Will had never expected to meet him again. Their paths hadn't slowly drifted into different directions instead, a huge fortress had been assembled around the Omega by the others to keep Crawford and the FBI out. Hannibal escorted the man into the office, Robert standing to greet him.

"Special Agent Jack Crawford." He said as way of an introduction, moving to the chair indicated by Robert. The agent smiled at the Omega. "Hello, Will."

"You know each other?" Robert inquired.

"Special Agent Crawford and his team rescued me." Will chose formality over familiarity to save another lecture from Hannibal on protocol.

Robert resumed his seat. "You must have been gratified the rescue was successful."

"It's a moment I will never forget." Jack couldn't forget the boy huddled in the corner against the bars, holding the blanket up to his chest as if it would offer protection. He couldn't forget the boy screaming for Hobbs, refusing to hand over the key and when Jack decided to take action and took hold of the bolt cutters, he couldn't forget, most of all, how quickly the boy had moved from sitting to running, picking up the bucket in one sweep of a hand and throwing the contents over him.

No fingerprints, other than Will's, on envelope and paper. The scent being synthetic was available in any pharmacy and the pig's head could be from any farm or slaughterhouse, Jack had explained, giving them assurances his team were still working on the case.

"You need to be on guard, step up security. Any more incidents, call me direct. Sometimes it's a one shot. Once it's known the FBI are involved, the perp crawls back under it's stone."

All very Crawford, Will had thought as he offered to walk Jack to his car.

"You've got taller, Will." Jack matched his steps with the smaller Omega as they walked along the hallway.

"You've got wider, Jack." Will had sampled Phyllis's cooking and knew Jack's only weaknesses were his wife's delicious meals and the Ripper. "Thanks for not going into detail about the rescue."

"You think I want a White House special advisor knowing you threw a bucket of piss over me. This letter yells you're not good enough for Lecter"

"Yeah, I got that too."

Will knew Jack would be way ahead in the investigation before meeting the Lecters. " Alibis. Hobbs was in hospital, Budge on a plane. We'll start looking at Hannibal's aggrieved exes, girlfriends, boyfriends, lovers. Sorry, Will, it's a long list."

"Aw, Jack, he told me he was a virgin."

"Sounds like I'm having a conversation with Jimmy Price."

"Yeah, with all these people in my head, not surprised one occasionally surfaces. God help you if Hobbs takes centre stage." Will grimaced.

"Don't let it scare you, Will. You won't lose control. You always fight your way back, Will, always will."

"I wish I had your belief in me."

"You may doubt yourself, Will, but don't doubt me."

"Thanks, Jack, it's good to have an ally." Will felt the old feeling of security returning.

"Will, you saved lives. In my book what you have, can do, is worth more than any paper telling me your grades. Maybe, one day, we'll be standing in my office having this conversation."

"You still think I can become an agent?" Will grinned

"Special investigator. That's what that name tag said. Will Graham - Special Investigator - FBI."

"That was joke, Jack, someone trying to wind you up."

"I considered it a prophecy."

"What next, confidential psychic informers?" Will laughed again

"I'll listen to anyone if it catches a killer." Hell, if an orang-utan could do what you do, I'd put it on the payroll."

"You probably would." Will knew there was a truth to Jack's statement.

As they arrived at the door, Jack faced the young Omega. "I don't have to tell you to be careful. Call me if you need anything."

As Jack drove away, a feeling of dejection took hold of Will. They both knew Jimmy was responsible for the name tag, but it went unsaid. That was how things worked at Quantico, you could shake the tree a little as long as the bough didn't break. The camaraderie he saw among the agents created a longing for that world, a place for which he knew he had

been designed. As he stood deep in thought, Will could smell the cedar and musk mixed with the expensive cologne Hannibal favoured. The Alpha came to a stop beside him.

"You handled yourself extremely well during the meeting. As you and Special Agent Crawford share a history, I expected you to act differently."

"Jack's working and he likes to keep it professional. He wouldn't appreciate it if I went all Omega on him. Talking of which." Will glanced at the Alpha "The way I behaved, it was stupid. I panicked, thought it was Hobbs."

"And you are now confident it was not he."

"Has an alibi. Jack checked him out first. He knew how my mind would work."

"You believe this Hobbs will seek you out yet you talk so little about him. Perhaps it is time for a discussion."

"If you want to know about him, read the dossier Frederick gave your parents. I buried the past a long time ago."

"Sometimes the graves we dig are shallow. I appreciate that information has been supplied to the family, but we need to talk, to help me understand."

"Maybe, one day, but not today." Will said quietly.

Will was glad to be doing something useful rather than be thinking about his past. His determination to clear his room by the end of the day spurred him on. The basement's gain wasn't his meditation room's loss as the size of the room appeared to increase in volume with the removal of each item. Robert had supplied him with more string to tie the newspapers together, then noticing the marks on the Omega's hands, found a pair of gloves Will could use when transporting the loads downstairs.

He could smell the evening meal being prepared and could hear the rest of the family arriving home. Hannibal had disappeared, this time to Baltimore, but again Will found he hadn't missed the Alpha's company preferring to talk occasionally to Robert as they met briefly in the hallway. As the final bundle made it's way into the basement, Will jumped up and down waving his hands in appreciation of the applause from the imaginary crowds.

Will took another shower after his efforts, the dust and dirt seemed ingrained in his pores. The two taps on his bedroom door as he finished pulling on the sweat pants announced the return of Hannibal and Will called out his customary response. The Alpha's awkward demeanour gave Will a sense of satisfaction, it was usually the other way around. With the bottle held tight in his hand, Hannibal shook his head slightly, a half smile on his face.

"When I said what I intended to say in my head, it sounded insulting. I am attempting to find a softer approach."

"Say it the insulting way."

Hannibal's voice was gentle, almost lyrical as if to sweeten the pill. "There has been a discussion and it would be for the best if you use this shower formula to lessen the strength of your scent. It would only be required when you venture outside the home, the family take blockers on most days and a resistant builds ."

"I smell bad?"

"I did not say your scent was offensive but considering recent events, it would be better if you blended in rather than stood out."

Will took the bottle from the Alpha, looking at the contents label on the back, lost for words.

Will felt his world conspiring against him, the mishaps following thick and fast, with the call from Jimmy coming at midday. The housekeeper sought Will out and seemed as surprised as the Omega someone would ring the house phone asking for a Will Graham. Jimmy was hyper and in this condition Will always had to read between the lines to gain the truth, but once he had established where Jimmy was calling from and hearing Jimmy dramatically announce an old enemy had risen from the depths, it was easier to understand the situation.

"Yeah, um I'll have to get a cab. No, no Hannibal's at work. I don't know Jimmy, as soon as I can." Will buried his face in his hands after replacing the handset.

"Trouble?" Zeller leaned over the stair rail looking down at the Omega.

"Yeah, er yes, the animal shelter I own. Baltimore animal control are there, they don't approve of privately run shelters, always hassling us." Will shuffled through the business cards set out on the desk. "Is there a cab company I can call?"

"I'll take you." Zeller was already down the stairs, taking a jacket from the intricately carved Black Forest hall stand. "Will, you can't go on your own."

Zeller sat in his car, door open, listening to the discussion go back and forth. Will gently steered Jimmy away from the group but the other Omega always made his way back, interjecting, arms waving around when emphasising a point. Zeller watched the power play take shape, as Will stood his ground, always trying to maintain eye contact with the two Alphas. It was soon established one was a senior representative, the other his deputy and both wore the air of seasoned professionals but once the Omega refused to give way, the tactics became physical with the deputy deliberately jostling Will, when the boy disagreed vehemently with a proposal. With a deep sigh, Zeller left his comfort zone to even the contest, standing by Will's side.

"So, you want someone to vouch for him." Zeller said again, pulling out his phone and wallet from inside his jacket. "My hospital identity card is in there, as well as my pass to the White House." He scrolled through his phone until he found the necessary photo. "And this

gentlemen is my Uncle Donald who will be very happy to talk to your superiors and vouch for Mr Graham."

Will was still smiling when they returned to DuMaurier House, beside the satisfaction of finally besting one of the most consistent pains in his backside over the last few months, the sense of being part of a family had seeped through when Zeller aided him.

"Where the hell have you been?" The yelling started as soon as Will walked through the door and he turned quickly to escape the anger, colliding with Zeller.

"Hey, calm down, Han, you're scaring him." Zeller allowed Will to stand behind him.

"I came home to find him gone. No one knew where he was, Zeller, we thought he had been taken."

"I left you a note. It's in your office. And I texted you."

"You should have asked permission first before taking him from the home."

Zeller yelled as he slowly ascended the staircase. "There's no talking to you, not when you're like this, Han."

Will stood at the doorway, looking at the floor, waiting for the Alpha's next action and when he heard Hannibal move away, only then did he lift his head.

To all intents and purposes, it was yet another lazy Sunday. Everyone seemed happy even Hannibal and Zeller, whose brief head butting had been forgotten by everyone except Will. No explanation, no apology just normal service had been resumed. Donald and Kade arrived in the afternoon, giving Donald the chance not to be President of the United States but just another family member.

Will had been persuaded to sit next to the older Omega in the sitting room. Alana swung the televion unit around so their view was not obscured, forcing them to watch the celebrated mini series about the struggle for Omega emancipation which both had always intentionally avoided.

"It's a wonderful, story, Will, set in the south." Will gave his smile as a thank you and rolled his eyes when she left, noticing everyone else but the Omegas had drifted away.

"It's crap." Kade voiced her opinion while Alana was still in earshot but Will kept silent by her side.

Kade was more ninja than nana with her little idiosyncrasies coming to the fore. Everyone who upset her were called bastards except Robert, who being favoured, was named The Bastard, her second most used expletive was crap.

"How did he upset you?" Will eventually summed up enough courage to ask.

"He sent my grandchildren away to that God forsaken country. My Bedelia didn't want to lose them but they went. Lost two grandkids and then the third....." She stopped speaking abruptly to control her emotions.

They played guess the accents as actor after actor attempted the drawl, agreeing on most with only one outfoxing them. "Texas out of Boston" they finally settled. It was during the third commercial break when she moved with relative speed, grabbing the voluminous knitting bag from the side of her chair, disappearing behind him.

"I'm knitting Matthew a scarf." Having caught glimpse of purple and orange yarn, Will hoped he liked bright colours. He heard the chink of glasses then a careful pouring of liquid and when she returned handed him the filled tumbler.

"It's a Kade special" She told him after he almost choked on the first sip.

"What's in it?" He gasped

"Doctor Feelgood." Was her only reply.

He knew he shouldn't have drunk it, but a third of the way through he didn't care. Hitting his nearly empty stomach meant it took full effect and lessened the pain of watching the dire drama set out before them. When the pseudo Texan revealed his character's origins with his *"I was born and raised in Louisiana"* Will dissolved into a heap with Kade joining him seconds later. The laughter drew attention but neither could stop and when Hannibal loomed over them, her quick *"Get rid of the evidence."* meant Will drank the remaining special in one go.

"Have you been drinking, Will?" The voice boomed and Will looking up at what appeared to be two Hannibals, gave a lopsided grin and a truthfull "Yep" in reply.

The fall-out was worse than he expected with a stony silence greeting him over breakfast. He went to give his apologies but the quick shake of the head from Robert accompanied with a kindly look meant his timing would be out.

It was late afternoon when he was finally summoned with Bedelia, Alana and Hannibal sitting in judgement. The long explanation as to why Kade should not drink and Alana's suggestion that Will should get help with his addiction problem, handing him drink awareness booklets, were nothing in comparison with the long, hard, icy stare emanating from Hannibal. Will's reply to their questions was always the same "I'm sorry" unable to give an explanation for his actions without giving up Kade and after tasting their Alphan justice, he would not let another Omega be subjected to their treatment.

The artic cold lessened around him over the next day with the exception of Hannibal who avoided talking to him at all costs even leaving the sitting room when Will entered, presenting the Omega with no option but to hide away. By Wednesday afternoon the

headache struck with a vengeance and Will found himself stumbling around the empty kitchen desperately trying to locate the aspirins. Robert passing by came to his assistance, even popping out the pills from the blister pack and filling the tumbler with water. He was about to follow the man's advice and return to bed when Robert touched his arm.

"It's all very well protecting a friend but not at the cost of your own wellbeing. She is a very able person and would have been forgiven far quicker than you have."

Will was overcome with the feeling of regret, wanting to sob and throw himself on their collective mercy, experience their hugs of forgiveness. Above all he wanted Hannibal to talk to him, but it was the final part of Robert's speech which made Will fear.

"Never lie to Hannibal. Sins of omission may be forgiven but never outright lies. Tell him the truth about Sunday and he will forgive you."

Crawling back to bed with covers over his pounding head, he put Robert's suggestion top of his "to do" list.

Will woke to the smell of slick and the sick realisation he was lying in a mess of his own making. He pushed the window wide open and grabbed the sheets from his bed, washing the offending area the best he could, hoping his Alpha neighbour hadn't noticed the distinctive scent. The day was a repeat performance of the previous one with the headache coming on him in the afternoon, grabbing the aspirins he kept them in his pocket so not to draw attention to his plight.

The phone call came during the evening meal with Mrs Brady, the housekeeper whispering in his ear. Excusing himself, Will listened to Frederick's tidings and accepted the invitation to lunch. Returning to his meal, he spoke directly to Bedelia, knowing with her approval Hannibal would not react negatively.

"Frederick has been asked to speak at a medical conference in Canada. He and Abel will be gone for a while so I've been invited over on Saturday." She responded warmly and with her clear support, Will felt a thawing out of the frosty atmosphere from all but one around him.

He knew he hadn't thought it through when Saturday had arrived. Without asking the others in advance and unable to locate them, his only option was to face Hannibal. He knocked on the office door and opened it without permission, standing on the edge of other's domain. The Alpha's look wasn't hostile neither did it emit friendship but with no other choice, Will ploughed ahead.

"I need the number for a cab company."

"I do not use their services so am unable to help you with your request. Ask someone else."

Will could sense a game of chess had been put into play and lacked the energy to engage. "Guess I'll have to get there under my own steam."

"Enjoy the walk."

With a shrug, Will strode along the hallway, grabbed his jacket and left. He passed the agents at the gate, indicating another Presidential visit and started the long walk to the sanctuary. He was barely ten minutes into his trek when the Bentley pulled alongside, with instructions given "Get in" Will meekly obliged. When they reached the end of the silent journey, Will turned to the Alpha next to him and with a sweet smile said his thanks, slamming the car door hard behind him. He picked up his stride as he walked to the entrance, relieved to be back home.

The reunion didn't go the way Will wanted. He ate his meal, the best thing for ages he told Abel, but with a voice sounding like Hannibal inside his head inspecting every word before it was uttered, he found himself hesitant."

"Yeah, I mean yes."

"Will, why are you constantly correcting yourself?" Frederick pulled his head back appearing to look down at Will along the line of his nose.

"Hannibal, um, he's trying to improve the way I speak."

"The fucker." Jimmy snarled. "There's nothing wrong with the way you talk."

"He's worried people will ridicule me, think I'm trailer trash." Will became defensive.

"It would appear the only person who is disparaging about your articulation is Mr Lecter himself." Abel declared

"Lecter can talk." Jimmy now enraged. "I can't understand a word the fucker says. He needs an interpreter."

"I have to agree with Jimmy's sentiments. He's hardly in a position to criticise your use of language." Frederick bridled

"Perhaps people laughed at him and that's why he's trying to improve me." The excuse sounded lame even to Will.

"I doubt that very much. Anyone who dared to laugh at the man would be beaten to a pulp. Has he threatened you, Will?"

"No, no threats, Frederick."

"Will?" Frederick's dander was sky high.

"Do I smell to you?" Will knew he had to ask the only people he really trusted.

"Smell, what do you mean?"

"Well, the Lecters think I have this smell about me. I have to use a scent reducer body wash." Will ducked his head.

"The fuckers." Jimmy snarled.

"How often do they criticise you, Will?" Frederick spat out the words.

"They think I have an alcohol problems."

Frederick was incandescent with rage. "You have never had any such problem. If you have now it is because you are living with those, those....."

"Fuckers." Jimmy hissed

"Will, what exactly is going on?" Frederick's voice became calmer.

"Nothing I do is right, I feel confused." Will's bottom lip began to tremble and he saw a tear splash onto his hand." I don't feel like myself.

Frederick heard the young Omega choke back a sob and shot from his chair, leaning over his former charge, he pulled him into a hug. " Will, this isn't right. They are making you unhappy and this won't be allowed to continue. Tell us everything, Will, we're here for you, we will always be here for you."

It took twenty minutes for the Omega to calm and divulge all the problems weighing him down.

"Kade Sutcliffe was famous for her partying, long before you came onto the scene. I am not criticising the woman, I've always liked her, but she is rather fond of wild turkey and I'm not talking about the bird." Frederick softly said. "You know you can stay here. Abel and I will be leaving tomorrow for the seminar but I'll gladly postpone if...."

"No, no, Frederick. I'm overreacting, you know getting married and leaving home. I'm making it sound worse than it is. It's just dealing with so many people, I can't always take in all those emotions."

"Against my better judgement, we'll get you and your belongings back there and remember, Jimmy is only phone call away. If you get into serious difficulties talk to Matthew, you can trust him." Frederick's words raised Will's spirits and he felt he could now face the residents of DuMaurier house.

Frederick Chilton had expected the gates to the driveway to open for him and when they didn't Frederick Chilton smouldered with anger. Will jumped out of the car and spoke to the agents, the same agents who were always on duty when the President visited.

"You can come in but he can't." The man's voice reeked of condescension.

"You know I live here. He's my friend."

"He's not on the approved list, so not a friend, not family." The agent stood firm. With Frederick joining Will at the gate, he could see humiliation written on the Omega's face.

"It's alright, Will, we can leave the items next to the gates and you can ferry them in. It's understandable, they need to be on their toes."

Between them they unloaded the car then said their goodbyes. Frederick turned on the ignition, executed a perfect turn and drove back to the sanctuary frequently muttering the same two syllable word under his breath.

Will moved his possessions through the house in stages, the biscuits, ginger ale and a portion of Abel's rabbit pie were the first to be taken into his bedroom. The guards had insisted on unpacking the two boxes to check the contents, leaving Will to replace them into the cardboard containers. He cursed himself for bringing so many of his books back from the sanctuary as he teetered up the stairs. He collapsed on his bed from the effort, laying flat on his back staring at the ceiling, his mind chewing over the events of the day, then the previous day then the one before that. The sudden rise of anger inside him was quickly replaced by total despair.

"*Suck it up, Graham"* he told himself as he rolled off the bed and padded downstairs to the sitting room. Through the glass doors, he could see the family sitting outside in the afternoon sunshine, laughing, enjoying each other's company, compounding his all too familiar feeling of isolation. His feet may have been willing to move but his heart told him otherwise. He really couldn't face sitting with a group of people who didn't know or understand him. Turning Will went back to his room.

Donald saw the caller's identity and debated whether to answer. He was relaxing with this family, forgetting the rigours of office and the world in general. Feeling churlish if he ignored his acquaintance, he relinquished. Frederick's voice was clinical and dispassionate, unlike his usual chatty self. It was a call made out of concern for Kade's well-being, a call to keep Donald in the loop and a call implying if the truth came out, his Omega mother would be labelled a drunk. Donald made note of everything Frederick mentioned and the one thing he did not - Will Graham. Of course, Frederick assured him, he had no desire for the facts to be in the public arena, he disliked the press as much as Donald, but the Beta had friends who could not always be discreet and he couldn't guarantee this information would not slip out. Sutcliffe knew better than anyone Frederick would make this information known if desired. He was gossipy that way.

Donald ambled into the house after the call ended and found Kade's large knitting bag. Not so much surprised to find the bottle secreted among the yarn and needles, more astonished at it's size. He placed her bag on the garden table without a word, just a kind smile on his face.

"Shall I open it or will you, mother."

"Got a search warrant?" The elderly Omega cocked her head to one side.

Donald could see the confusion on the face of the others. "I'll cut to the chase, mother. I blamed Will for you getting drunk, thought he supplied you with alcohol and encouraged you to drink."

"More fool you if you blamed the boy, I encouraged him." Looking directly at Robert, the woman spat out the words which everyone knew to be the absolute truth. "I wouldn't drink that bastard's liquor, I always supply my own."

Will was grateful for the silence of the house after the guests had left. Content to sit on his bed with legs crossed under him reading one of his favourite books. Hannibal entering his room and banging the door shut made the Omega jump.

"You lied to me, Will."

Will was wide eyed staring at the Alpha. His mouth tried to work but automatically stopped when the scent hit him. Every sense told him he was facing something dangerous and he should submit.

"Donald searched her bag. It was found, Will, the alcohol. Why did you lie?"

"I didn't know what to say." The words tumbled out of his mouth.

"By saying nothing you led us to believe you were responsible. Did you think you were being noble? Acting morally superior to the rest of us by taking the blame?"

"No, no, I shouldn't have gone along with it, the drinking. It seemed fun at the time but it wasn't."

"But you had time to tell the truth. When we spoke to you, you had the opportunity to rectify the mistake. Instead you have made us look fools"

Will clambered off the bed, hands held out trying to placate the Alpha.

"It wasn't my intention. You all seemed ready to believe I was to blame. It was easier to go along with it, but it was wrong. I'm sorry."

"You are always sorry, Will, but your behaviour does not change. Is this a game to you?"

"I, I don't know what you mean?"

"Your actions today, walking alone when you have been threatened. Was your intention to make me jealous, perhaps attract another male and create conflict." Will saw Hannibal had moved slightly closer.

"No, no, I wasn't thinking, just a little angry maybe 'cause you wouldn't talk to me."

"So you admit you tried to draw my intention by putting yourself in danger." Hannibal moved again.

"No, no that's not what I'm saying." With Hannibal taking another step forward, Will looked around the room in desperation seeking a way to escape.

"Did you think I did not smell you, the other morning. Not aware of your efforts to pull me under your control. You will attend the Omega clinic this week in order to keep your urges in check."

"No" The words were out of his mouth before he could think. "You can't make me go there, let strangers touch me. I thought that you....."

"You think I would debase myself to satisfy your needs." Hannibal shouted

Will spat the words at him. "That's what Alphas do. If you can't manage it, maybe I'll find one that ....."

Hannibal was upon him, the hand around his throat slamming Will against the wall. Will grabbed at the wrist with both hands as his feet scrambled against the floor. The shock of the action took hold and the Omega found himself whimpering from it.

The words rasped in his ear. "You are all the same, without dignity, without self respect. The truth about Omegas is when they simper and mewl and say their needy little hole needs to be fucked, they do not care who does the fucking."

With the Alpha gone, Will slumped to the floor and in his mind he could see the wall which restrained all his emotions crumble.

Chapter 23

Hannibal stood in the sun room arm outstretched, hand tightly gripping the door frame as if he was in need of support. In the other hand, one of the finer cut glass tumblers filled with whisky.

Zeller noted the stance, the set jaw and recognised the signs. "What's wrong?"

"Have you ever behaved in a manner you instantly regretted. Said words you wish you could take back."

"Will?" Zeller guessed it could be no other in such a short space of time.

"I cannot put this right."

"Han, what have you done?"

Zeller listened to his brother's account, not making any comments, waiting for the ending. With a nod of understanding he muttered. "I'll get mother."

Bedelia climbed the staircase in her spiked heeled suede shoes, each step taken with care and elegance. She stood at the door listening before tapping lightly, calling out. "Will, it's Bedelia. May I come in" With no response she requested again. "Will, it's me. I'm alone. May I come in?"

Hearing no reply, she cautiously opened the door to the darkened room. Reaching she found the light switch, turning the dial and once the room was flooded with light, turning it again to a lower setting. The floor was strewn with items, books, ginger ale bottles, shoes and blankets. She was tempted to look under the bed to see if the Omega had taken refuge there, as most sought out the darkest places to hide when in extreme distress. She could hear a quiet whining mixed with the occasional gasp for breath and traced the source to the armoire.

"Will, please let me talk to you." Her words mildly spoken as she gingerly stepped towards the source of the noise. She had to wait, wait for him to want the contact, the comfort. She heard the slight creak of hinges as the door opened. She pulled off her shoes, quickly setting them to one side, then with slow deliberate movements lowered herself to her knees, satisfied he wouldn't startle, she adjusted her position until she sat beside him. She could see in the half light his huddled form, legs drawn up, one hand bunching the hem of his shirt, periodically putting it to his face to wipe away the tears.

Hannibal watched her descend the stairs until she stopped three steps shy of the bottom, making mother and son equal height. Her hand whipped round, palm open, slapping him on the left side of the face with such force it fractionally lifted her from her shoes.

"Get out of my sight." Were the only words she could summon.

Will woke adrift unsure of his surroundings. The bedroom and the smells which permeated the room were foreign. The two blankets had been tucked tight around him taking him minutes to work loose from the cocoon. He noticed the chair pulled up alongside the bed, a blanket dropped onto the seat then the vague memories of the previous evening filtered through before chronologically adjusting in his head. As the door opened a jolt of fear slammed into him, along with the name associated with the fear, *Hannibal.*

Bedelia carried the tray effortlessly, Will pictured her enjoying ballet lessons as a child, practising her deportment throughout her teenage years, aware her small stature could make her unnoticeable, confident her graceful movements would not. The coffee and toast were placed on the white vanity.

"I wasn't sure if this would be suitable, I know you usually have eggs for breakfast."

"No, no, no that's fine." Will was happy to eat anything.

"You've slept for eight hours. You were very still, had to shake you occasionally, just to reassure myself you were still functioning."

"I'm sorry for all the trouble I've put you through." The understanding she had spent the night caring for him brought back memories of his mother and with it, the sorrow.

"You are not responsible, Will, the fault lies entirely with Hannibal."

"Is he here?"

"Baltimore for the next few days until conciliation is found."

He was unsure about returning to his own room despite Bedelia's reassurance regarding Hannibal's departure but the desire to be on his own, go into his head prevailed. Relaxing on the bed, he closed his eyes and turned back the clock. As the pieces slotted together, Will viewed Hannibal's anger surface after the Omega verbally fought back and wondered if he had initially supplicated himself, fallen to the ground begging forgiveness, whether the Alpha would have been satisfied. Will played different sequences over and over, each departed from the actual turn of events, the endings varied but with the certainty the Omega could never win, never triumph over the Alpha. Hannibal may have been representative of the modern day Alpha but his nature would trump society's moral expectations, his Alphan DNA would never allow him to relinquish control but his own isolation sought an equal with whom

to share his life, someone he thought worthy. Will found himself laughing out loud at the thought of Hannibal waking one morning to find Garrett Jacob Hobbs lying next to him.

Will sighed deeply as he rolled off the bed, everything had been tidied, returned to their proper place no doubt at Bedelia's hands and he felt guilt tripped by her actions. He decided to his search for his cases, starting with the old bathroom across from his room, the only area he had no wish to visit. It's style seemed better suited to an institution from another century and with his mind doing cartwheels he could envisage a bloated corpse floating in the freestanding copper tub. Will opened the door to the bathroom tentatively, seeing the ugly green tiles on the wall made him shiver but the need to do something positive made him advance.

"Lost something." Will jumped back and turned angrily.

"You scared the bejeebers out of me."

"You don't like the bathroom either." Zeller grinned

"Creeps me out."

"Vintage horror. You're lucky, had to use it when I was a kid. Only two bathrooms on the entire upper floor, either that or shower downstairs with a goat. What were you looking for?"

"Cases, I unpacked, then they were stored away by er, Hannibal."

"Planning on leaving?"

"What do you think, can't stay here."

"He's sorry, Will. Truly sorry, he was upset for losing it."

"Makes two of us."

"What will you do, go back to the sanctuary and start the whole process again?"

Will rolled his shoulders in an attempt to ease the tension in them. "I don't trust Hannibal anymore."

"If he gives you his word that it won't happen again then it won't. His word means everything to him."

"As I said, I don't trust him." Will spoke without any trace of emotion.

"Maybe you should have married Valdas, he's strictly no violence unless attacked."

Will managed a smile. "I like him, he's one of life's good guys but I don't see him other than a friend. We would have ended up as great fishing buddies though."

"No spark. Not like you and Hannibal. Saw it first time you met."

Will's eyes flashed anger . "That's not fair."

"Hannibal is very intelligent and gregarious, he sweeps people along. Very few keep up, those who do he keeps close."

"What does he do with the stragglers, put them out of their misery." Will mimicked holding a gun in his hand and pulling the trigger.

"You wouldn't be a straggler. You might even best him."

Will laughed out a reply. "Sure, kick him on the ankles and run."

"Will, I work in the E R, see many people brought In who shouldn't be alive but against all odds make a full recovery. You're a survivor, Will, you couldn't have gone through so much trauma if you weren't"

"Yeah, escaped one lunatic to marry another." Will muttered.

Zeller bit back the urge to snap. "He's my brother, Will, I'm programmed to defend him, but I don't want to see you go. You're good for this family, livened things up."

Will couldn't stop the laughter on seeing the irony of the situation. "I'm your entertainment."

Zeller shook his head. "More like kid brother."

Will stopped laughing to look up at Zeller's face, seeing no deceit, Will felt the all too familiar pull of imaging himself as part of this family.

"Give me time." The words escaped Will without permission.

The house had a deflated "after the party" atmosphere, conversation was stilted with one of the Lecters apparently assigned to keep Will company at all cost. Robert broke through the awkwardness by presenting the Omega with two biographies of Aaron Sutcliffe.

"I would recommend the earlier edition." Robert spoke with the air of someone who had read both books from front cover to back on more than one occasion. "It covers the Oscar Warren trial in greater detail and includes the prosecution's uncensored notes."

Will didn't have to verbally express his thanks, the beaming smile on his face did it for him and for the rest of the day through to the early hours of the next morning, he was lost in the tome.

He guessed it was Alana's tour of duty when she followed him into the sitting room after breakfast. He had placed his book on the couch in readiness to resume his journey through

the mind of Aaron Sutcliffe and a resentment reared up when she began to initiate a conversation.

"Have you thought about the future, Will?" Her voice was honeyed.

Will couldn't resist the sarcasm. "Mine or the world's?"

She gave him a smile which on another day he would have accepted as kindly. "There are a number of excellent guidance counsellors in Baltimore who specialise in mixed dynamic marriages. They could teach you coping mechanisms."

He stared at her, tried to see inside. "What would they teach Hannibal?"

"It is generally the Omega who undergoes therapy, they are less resistant than Alphas."

"I have my own coping mechanisms. Abel taught me." He could see something conflicted inside her, regarding her feelings towards him.

"Meditation is an excellent medium for relaxing but the emotional pitfalls of a mixed marriage needs an expert hand. Maybe assertive therapy may help you."

Will caught her look and understood. Changing posture, head down he spoke in a hesitant voice. " I may have made a mistake, should have married someone else."

"Someone like Randall would have been a much better match, you would have been more suited."

The early morning journey to Baltimore had been trouble free and Zeller, with an hour to spare, was able to deliver the items to his brother then carry on to the hospital in time for his shift. He made his way through Hannibal's office with the Omega secretary watching his every move. There was something about Ardelia that made Zeller nervous, although all their conversations were pleasant even warmish she never addressed him by name. She pointed to the door on her right. "He's in and expecting you."

He gave her a smile and nod of thanks and closed the door behind him, depositing the bag in one chair, himself in another. "Got everything on your list. Thought you'd have extra sports gear at the town house."

"Took it back home to be laundered. Will?"

"Mother's been fussing over him." Zeller grinned

Hannibal looked up from his paperwork. "I am not proud of myself, my behaviour was appalling."

"Will and I talked. There's no hatred there, Han."

"I need to retrieve some paperwork from home. If I call in tomorrow perhaps Will and I can open a dialogue."

"Just be visible, everything else has to be on Will's terms. He enjoys being part of a family, knows he's got a lot to lose, an Omega being ousted from a family can be emotionally catastrophic"

"If Will is growing used to the concept of being a Lecter, this has to be resolved, one way or another, before he cements himself too far into the family structure."

He traced Will to the sun room then hesitated not wanting to take the boy from his reading. Zeller held up his phone. "He's on his way, he texted me. Should take him about an hour."

Will looked up, closing the book. "Make myself scarce, don't particularly want to bump into him. He won't come upstairs will he?" Bedelia had told him that morning about Hannibal's visit, emphasising the Alpha would be restricted to the downstairs area only.

"No, he's not here to talk. What's with the glasses." Zeller saw how they had changed the boy's look from seraphic to scholarly.

"Headache. Got any aspirins?"

Zeller nodded. "Cut out the reading, that's all you seem to do."

"Not much else I can do till I've decided."

"Get to know him, Will."

"He's unpredictable."

"You're different depending who you are talking with. Not even sure if this is the real Will Graham I'm talking to now."

"My empathy, I adopt other people's mannerisms, speech patterns. Abel taught me how to control it, but I seem to have wandered from the path."

"Have you thought about Alana's idea of guidance."

Will rolled his eyes. "The last time I had therapy, I sounded like my psychiatrist for a month. It doesn't work cause I know all their tricks."

"Well, unlearn them. Professional help can solve problems."

"When I was at Quantico this doctor told me I shouldn't fight my empathy. Let myself embrace the other person if the person was somebody I admired." Will shook his head in

remembrance. "Nearly destroyed me. That's why I don't let just anyone go poking around inside my head."

"How did Abel succeed?"

"I access strong childhood memories. Ones I associate with pleasure and peacefulness. I'm either fishing with my father or at my Grandma Graham's house. She had a long case clock with a glass front. When I was real small I used to sit in front of it watching the pendulum swing from side to side. I use them to clear away the wreckage inside my head, get it in order."

"You don't know Hannibal, Will, he isn't cold blooded, he helps people. He doesn't expect thanks or take credit for his actions."

"Is this therapy, Dr Lecter."

"When Hannibal left for Lithuania, mother took it badly. Put on an emotional armour, thinking in two years time I would follow them. When Valdas decided to stay in Lithuania, she wasn't surprised, He had fallen in love with the life style. It suited him. Hannibal was taking up an internship in Paris when he was eighteen, but when he and Valdas came back for a holiday, I just knew he wasn't coming back at all. Don't know how it happened. There was just the three of us. I told him I knew, kept yelling for him to confirm it. When he told me after Paris he was going to live with Valdas, I just lost the plot. Attacked him, kept hitting him, telling him he had ruined my relationship with mother. Hannibal wouldn't fight back, kept taking the punches until Valdas pulled me off. They went out and when they came back home in the evening, Hannibal announced he was coming back home after Paris. Everyone was happy, except Valdas and because I also knew the truth, me. All Hannibal ever asked was to keep this a secret from the rest of the family. So we made a pact."

"Did they ever find out?"

"Father guessed. Said I should never forget how much Hannibal loved me, making such a sacrifice."

"Sounds like you're trying to Omega me, make me feel sorry for him."

Zeller decided to change tactics. "You never hurt anyone, Will? Never done things you later regretted?"

The Omega looked down at his hands folded in his lap. The tableau flashed in front of his eyes, Hobbs, the encampment, and the horror on the man's face as the rope tightened. "I didn't deserve this."

"You're right, Will. Hannibal's willing to talk."

Will took a moment for himself. "I have to know why he hates Omegas."

"He doesn't hate them, Will, just.....well, that's his story to tell. Do you want to leave?"

"No. Why?"

"This situation can only end one of two ways. Do you want to leave?"

"I like this family." Will whispered

"Call a truce and talk." As they both stood up Zeller put his arm around the boy's shoulder. "Because we like having you around."

Will returned to his room, inside his head the wheels were spinning with the overload of emotion and information being thrown his way. He hadn't rested long when he heard the voices outside being carried on the breeze into his room. Changing position Will had to kneel on his bed to see out of his window. Hannibal and Zeller stood on the lawn engaged in conversation. Hannibal dressed in beige pants and white shirt, had his sleeves rolled up to the elbows. His arm made a sweeping motion towards the house but the field of his vision prevented Will seeing the focus of their interest. Hannibal moved away from his brother, walking casually to the border of the lawn, his strides confident with just the slightest swing of his arms in time with his step.

Will licked his lips and breathed deeply, thrilled to be able look at the man unobserved, trying to weigh the cultured Alpha against the savage force which held his throat in a tight grip. Closing his eyes he saw a single golden blade cut through the dark. The words twisted in the wind matching various scenarios in the Omega's life which the Alpha had played a part. Viewing himself leaving Hannibal's office with *"enjoy your walk"* whispering in his ear, the letters slammed together over his head ..... ***CLAIMED.*** The clarity of the Alpha's conduct presented itself, acting not out of concern for Will's safety, not protecting his financial asset but something much more primitive. Will slowly exhaled out of his mouth, feeling powerful.

The meeting at City Hall was tortuous, the officials from the Permit office were intent on their fifteen minutes of fame placing hurdles the architects had to clear. Hannibal considered every additional question asked superfluous but answered each with charm and good grace. He waited until he returned to the Bentley before checking his phone. Zeller's messages were always concise, never discursive. "Will's agreed to meet you. Tomorrow. Noon."

They walked from the stables to the field with Hannibal leading his grey. The horse seemed much taller, broader now Will was walking alongside it. The field was adjacent to the stables laid out flat surrounded by trees.

"We have extra security in this area." Hannibal pointed to the cameras fixed high up on the trees. "Stealing the horse would mean leading him through the woods or along the path. He

is not predisposed towards people except for myself and will not let anyone else ride him."

As if on cue the horse walked up to the fence and nuzzled Will under the chin. The palm of Hannibal's hand was placed flat against Will's cheek, his thumb stroking Will's lips. "He has fallen for you, Will, as have I."

"This is a dream." Will shouted. "None of this is real" With a jolt he was awake to the early morning light and the taste of disappointment.

Will sat outside in the sunshine waiting. Having choreographed the meeting to give him the advantage, with Hannibal showing deference by treading a path down the steps to the lawn where Will was seated at the garden table. Hands clasped together as if in prayer, eyes flickering to catch Hannibal's approach, Will ducked his head at the last moment to look at his hands resting on the table. Hannibal's clothes amplified his physical appeal, casual yet tailored and the walk Will noticed earlier was still evident.

"May I sit down?" The request seemed ridiculous to Will as he felt like the guest but he nodded, giving consent. He waited for Hannibal to settle before glancing at him through dark lashes, making sure his head was bent slightly downward as to not bare his neck. Will had elected to wear his black shirt, open two buttons down, knowing it was enough to highlight his necklace.

"To attack you physically is reprehensible and to spit those words into your face should be unforgivable which confuses me as to why you would accept my apology when offered."

"This is your home not mine. If I don't accept I would have to leave." The honesty of the Omega's words took Hannibal by surprise.

"This is supposed to be your home, Will, if you feel uncomfortable it was not deliberate on my part."

"If I leave because of your behaviour, our contract will be nullified. Your family would lose the land and having met Valdas, I wouldn't want him or them to be unhappy. Besides I would be back to where I started.....alone." Will spoke the last word just above a whisper.

"And you would just accept my apology and things would go back to the way they were."

"No, not the way they were. I need to understand what went wrong." Will thought carefully before continuing. "What I did to make you so angry."

"You are accepting the blame."

"I singularly blame you for your violent outburst but will accept something I did triggered your reaction." Unexpectedly overwhelmed with a desire to prostrate himself before his Alpha and beg for forgiveness and punishment, Will crushed his Omegan submission instinct underfoot.

Hannibal leaned back against the chair, rubbing his chin with his index finger as if perplexed by the route the conversation had taken, then casually moved forward to mirror Will's position. "I allowed anger to fester inside of me, instead of discussing the situation with you like an adult."

"Anger about what?"

"You walked from the house alone. Potentially you were at risk therefore I had to follow you. I made a promise to protect you, if anything were to happen, then my promise would have been a falsehood."

"So you were concerned about your reputation rather than me."

"Will, you were threatened and I care about your safety."

Will's mind skated around a maze of actualities. "Okay, maybe it was stupid to walk out like that, but those words .....they belonged to another time, another person."

"Bad experiences in the past have coloured my outlook. Not an excuse but an explanation."

"What happened?" Will felt he was on the verge of breaking through the outer wall of Hannibal's defences.

"Quid pro quo. I asked you about your past, you wish to know about mine. An exchange of information seems fair."

"I buried the past."

"A shallow grave in which mine is also buried."

Frustrated Will shook his head and stood up. "Is this a game to you, Hannibal?"

"Donald said the two suspects who possibly desecrated our home have alibis." Hannibal stated

"True, so it was probably a local who hates duals."

"Or Clark Ingram. That man seems to have been overlooked by everyone except me."

Will's mouth opened then closed and he sat back down feeling safer with the Alpha than away from him.

"I profoundly apologise for my actions and my words. I will endeavour to make sure such an incident will never occur again. But if you leave this house alone while under threat, put yourself in danger, I will bring you back even if I have to throw you over my shoulder and carry you all the way back home. Do I make myself clear, Will?"

Chapter 24

QUANTICO transcript of voice recording - six weeks after rescue

CRAWFORD: Dr Greenaway is suggesting your relationship with Hobbs ran much deeper.

WILL: He's got it wrong, Jack, what he's saying, he makes it out to be something it wasn't, you know, something dirty.

CRAWFORD: Sexual.

WILL: Yeah, because I said I had to bond with Garrett, he thinks of it that way, said it was unhealthy. It's not what I meant.

JORGENSEN: Passive psychological response to your new master has been an essential survival tool for over a million years. Bond with your captor you survive, if you don't you're breakfast.

WILL: Why did you say breakfast?

CRAWFORD: You told Greenaway that Hobbs didn't kill your sisters, didn't kill your mother. Will, it looks like you're defending the man.

WILL: I'm not defending him but I'm not gonna lie. *(voice raised)*

CRAWFORD: We know he killed, Will. We know you saw him kill. What happened after he killed them. *(words shouted)*

WILL: I can't, I can't say it. Please don't make me, Jack, don't make me say it. *(sound of sobbing)*

The customary two knocks on the door signalled the start of the new day. Will sat on the edge of the bed combing his fingers through his hair, more forcibly than intended.

"Come in." He called out to Hannibal but didn't look up when the Alpha opened the door.

"I was making sure you were awake. I heard you moving around in the middle of the night and was concerned."

"Cramp, both legs." Couldn't sleep anyhow."

"Were you unsettled because of my return?" Will looked up at the Alpha trying to read the expression on his face but found nothing.

"No, just wasn't tired. Tried reading but that didn't work. Wasn't thinking about anything in particular, just not tired."

"I will be back this afternoon and would like to look over the report to NOGA, if that is acceptable."

Will gave a half smile. "Yeah, if I'm awake."

Breakfast was the usual affair as Will pushed the eggs around the plate taking the occasional small portion into his mouth. The spasmodic conversation stayed between Robert and Zeller and as Will looked at the texture of the eggs, the memory of brain matter stuck to Abigail's shirt flashed by. Will's eyes began to close as he searched for the stream, seeing it in the distance, he walked quickly across the uneven ground and as exhaustion took hold, he couldn't resist the urge to lay down.

"Will." His head jerked back at the sound of his name and as he looked around the table he was met with looks of concern.

"Your head was about to make contact with your breakfast." Robert said

"Yeah, ahm bad night." Was the only response the Omega could find.

The fresh air and caffeine kept him awake, allowing him to attack the weeds and unknown plant life in the greenhouse with vigour. Bedelia, insisting he wear a coverall, procured one which was at least two sizes too large therefore had to cut the legs and sleeves to the appropriate length. More scarecrow than gardener, he still appreciated her thoughtfulness. Exceeding his usual quota of coffee in his system, Will wasn't too surprised when the headache struck. With trying to work it off failing, he eventually succumbed and came to a halt.

Another two aspirins ingested by the time Hannibal returned, Will found the pounding in his head began to subside as he sat by the Alpha.

"Do you feel warm, Will?" The Alpha could feel the heat generated by the Omega on his arm.

"I run hot." Will gave his standard response.

He followed the report the best he could, faltering occasionally, not quite grasping the point the Alpha was trying to make. "Are you sure they will want to see me."

Hannibal nodded. "You are in my care and they will want to satisfy themselves that you are content. Understanding you are still willing to learn and plan to further your education will qualm any fears they may have about our marriage."

Another coffee, one of Hannibal's special blends, the headache had disappeared and Will, pleased he was communicating with the Alpha and ecstatic his head had stopped hurting, sported a smile. With the session over and one hand on the handle ready to leave, he glanced over his shoulder to the Alpha.

"I know why you want me to be successful and I'll promise when the time comes, I won't let you down. I'll behave in the way you want and speak as you've instructed but at home, I need to be myself. So if I yeah instead of yes, don't chew me out. Okay?"

For one second Will thought he had overstepped the mark but the edges of Hannibal's mouth turned upwards. "I have huge faith in you, Will and for educational purposes I believe you need more carrot than stick. So yeah will suffice at home."

Will laughed at Hannibal's attempt at saying the word, sounding more yah than Will's vocalisation and was pleased to see the first signs of a thaw in their relationship. Hannibal watched as the young Omega walked down the hallway, enjoying the view as the slender form slowly disappeared from sight, amused the Omega had begun to find his voice.

His anxiety levels rose with the first signs of daybreak after enduring another sleepless night, the growing frustration at being unable to sleep moved him briefly to tears knowing he would soon be leaving his bed. Turning yet again, covering his head with the blankets, he soon found inhaling his own expelled breath created mild hyperventilation, Will threw off the blankets and turned onto his left side, trying to find the elusive comfortable spot in his bed before giving up.

Most of the day he struggled, feeling he was carrying his own body weight on his shoulders. He drifted aimlessly between gardening and studying the infrastructure of corporate business and other related journals which he had no thirst to read other than to please Hannibal. With two aspirins already in his system as a prevention rather than cure, the headache wasn't as debilitating as the previous day and with the addition of another strong coffee it receded.

"You stupid man." He heard Bedelia calling. Leaning into the dark nothingness of the doorway of the basement, she turned when she heard the Omega approaching. "Can you help him, Will, he's stuck."

In the half light, Will took tentative steps down the stairs until halfway down he faced the man, a bundle of newspapers placed on the stairs at his feet. Will grabbed the stack and began walking back towards the light of the hallway, waiting every few steps, making sure Robert was still progressing. On reaching the top he stood listening as Bedelia berated her husband.

"You couldn't wait, could you? I told you Will would help but you had to act like a twenty year old something. Silly, silly man, you could have been injured."

"I'm fine, my darling. I could have managed if there had been better light."

"Don't you dare do that again, Robert. Get one of the boys to help you."

Will couldn't stop the laugh from escaping, listening to the Alpha being scolded as if a naughty child.

"See how she treats me. This is the side of her she keeps hidden. The inner Rottweiler." Robert puffed out as he made it to the top. "Would you be good enough to take these to my office, William."

The study reflected Robert's inner core, a room suited to an academic or head of covert intelligence, with the honey oak Partner's desk dominating the room. To one side on top the desk sat the desk set holding a Visconti fountain pen and to the other, a small cut glass jar full of mints. Above the desk, pinned to the wall and central to the knee hole, was a map of the world. Pointing to the newspapers Robert explained that having missed out on writing a biography of his father-in-law, he had chosen to tell the Sutcliffe story from a different angle.

"Not all newspapers have digital archives so I have picked the periodicals which contain the lesser known facts, the more family based occurrences which may not have been world changing but held their own amusement and interest. I have been collecting them for years."

He showed Will how he processed each article, cutting them from the newspaper and pinning them onto an index card, scanning them onto a computer before slipping them into their plastic protective sleeve and with his love of history, Will lapped it up. He showed the contents of one smaller cabinet to Will where the items were finally stored, taking out a manuscript which heralded the latter days of Aaron and the beginnings of Donald.

"So you're writing President Sutcliffe's biography already."

"It is time consuming but as I have temporarily relaxed control of my law practice to my capable partners, I have decided to return to writing as a hobby. Something to remove me from the politics of the office and the White House."

Will thought of the irony in Robert's statement considering the subject matter. "Do you want my help, I can cut out the articles for you."

"Has he inveigled you into his scheme." Bedelia stood at the doorway.

"The boy has just volunteered. If I remember correctly, you ceased to assist me when you increased your working hours. Besides you were a butterfly, flitting from one project to another without completion."

"Oh, I see." Bedelia placed a hand on her hip. "I have been usurped."

"Yes, my lady, I have another who will serve me better. Now be gone, wench and let the men deal with matters of state. This is no place for a mere woman."

Bedelia pointed her finger at Will. "Usurper." She called out in a theatrical manner as Robert pushed the door shut in her face.

Chuckling he returned to Will. "We were members of an amateur dramatic group when we lived in Lithuania. Bedelia's Lady Macbeth was universally praised, my attempts were not. I think it was a mistake to attempt to play Macbeth with a Scottish accent, they didn't understand a word out of my mouth. If the truth were told neither did I."

"I thought it was for real for a moment. She's good." Unlike many Alpha couples who stayed together to maintain their social position, Will could see the truth behind Robert and Bedelia's relationship, could see they were sweethearts.

Robert laughed again. "No, my darling wife is very pleased in her quiet way not to be asked to help. She grew up with these tales and for her the task could become boring whereas I am fresh to them. They will give you a better insight about the family you have married into, and when the time comes, insight into the genes your children will inherit."

Will stood momentarily opened mouthed at the last comment but found solace in Robert's anticipation of a possible Graham Lecter production.

As Alana hurried into the sitting room all eyes turned to her as the angry words spilled out, late home from work, the tension swirled around her.

"You haven't registered, Will. I had a call from a colleague today and she told me that you and Hannibal are not on the database. She thought it was an oversight but we both know that's not true."

"What, what are you talking about?" Will stumbled with the words.

"All Omegas have to register at sixteen at a heat clinic. You are not on any database, I checked. Do you have any idea how serious this is for Hannibal. Did you know?" She addressed the last remark to her brother.

"No, we have not discussed it. I assumed Will was already registered." Hannibal looked from sister to Omega. "Did you forget, Will?"

Will felt his face reddened. "I didn't have to until eighteen, duals don't.....not until later."

"As your Alpha this has major implications for Hannibal. He could be investigated, be placed on the abuse register. Who is your doctor, they should have submitted the paperwork when you married."

"Abel's my doctor."

"You can't stay with him, Will, you should be with a doctor who is licensed at a clinic. Gideon is not a database doctor."

"He's a licensed apothecary. I can have both."

"Do you know why you have to be registered, Will. It is stop Omega abuse. You have no idea the ordeals Omegas have undergone at the hands of Alphas."

"Don't I?" Will laughed out the reply.

"Hannibal, you need to set up an appointment. I'll give you the number."

"No, I control my health care." Will shouted.

Alana's voice became shrill with exasperation. "I'm trying to help you, Will but if you can't manage a simple task such as registering then you shouldn't be entrusted with your own care. If you understood the difficulties first time heats present, the range of problems...."

"Stop it." Will yelled as he rose from the couch and walked toward Alana. "I don't need an Alpha pretending to be an Omega telling me how to run my life." He snarled as he brushed past her and made his way out of the room.

He stayed in his bedroom annoyed with himself for his flash of temper, deciding to forgo his nightly warm milk and try for sleep. With it evading him, Will picked up the book from the night stand losing himself in the words until the clock showed twelve thirty. He heard the two taps and looked towards the door. "It's open."

Hannibal dressed in maroon pyjamas stood in the doorway. "Problems sleeping, Will? I saw the light."

"Yeah, feel exhausted but it seems like my brain has forgotten how to fall asleep."

"I may have a way to help you, but I will have to touch you."

Will tried not to look shocked but failed. "Okay, but what exactly.....?"

"Massage." Hannibal called out as he disappeared from sight. "By completely relaxing the body, the brain also relaxes."

The Alpha returned to the room carrying a small bottle and Will felt the cheeks of his ass squeeze tight. "You're not...."

Hannibal could see the boy wide eyed and nervous. "For your back. Take off your top and lay face down. I will attempt to work your muscles loose."

Will's compliance was hampered when his fingers and thumbs failed to grip the edge of his under shirt on several occasions before he could yank it over his head and drop it to the floor, keeping his boxers in place. He could smell the scent as the Alpha sat down beside him on the bed and couldn't resist inhaling deeply. He heard the top of the bottle being unscrewed then felt the liquid being poured onto his skin in a wide circle. As the palm of the hand touched him smoothing the liquid over his back, Will fought every instinct to push up from the bed and arch his back into a semi submissive pose Alphas found desirable. As the thumbs replaced the palm, they were placed either side of his spine then slowly with a small amount of pressure moved along to his neck then back down again. Will couldn't stop a small moan escaping from his lips as the process was repeated again and again. The fingers travelled to his shoulder blades, the long strokes finding tension knots and the Alpha applied waves of focused pressure with the thumbs.

"Why are you doing this, Hannibal?" Will was overcome by the need to satisfy his curiosity.

"Firstly, as an apology. My sister had no right to speak to you about such personal matters in front of the family."

"I shouldn't have snapped." Will murmured offering his own kind of apology.

"You stopped a conversation which could contain details my father would have found embarrassing. He does not work in the medical field and over the years has put up with similar exchanges. A friendship is developing between you and my father, but there are matters you and he would never broach, not even in private."

"I'd wouldn't talk about those kind of things with your dad or in front of him."

"Precisely. You and he are establishing your boundaries and I am happy both my parents expressed a fondness for you."

Will's mind danced over his and Hannibal's boundaries aware that his covered ass was just a few feet away from his Alpha and his scent was getting stronger from every touch of the Alpha's strong fingers.

"This is also a lesson in trust. Due to my recent behaviour I feel the need to prove that you can trust me."

"And you want to prove you can trust yourself around me." Will wondered if he wiggled his hips just a little how his Alpha would respond.

As Hannibal's fingers glided up and down the boy's neck. the Omega's breathing became deeper and regular. "You need sleep, Will, I have seen how sleep deprivation can affect people, just relax."

Hannibal was partially dressed when the gentle knocks sounded on the door, he slipped on his shirt as he called out. "Come in, Will."

The door opened slightly and the messy brown curls appeared first followed by the face, peering gradually around the door in apprehension.

"I haven't got any shirts, I wondered if you have any spares."

"I'll get one from Zeller, you are closer in size. I need to see him, it will not take long."

"I'll get showered and Hannibal, thanks, for helping me sleep." The Omega's eyes briefly scanned the Alpha's exposed chest, eyes flickering away and a reddish tinge began to appear on his face when the boy saw Hannibal observing him.

Hannibal opened the door to his brother's room without warning and made his way to the closets. "Will needs a shirt, yours would be a better fit."

Zeller's head appeared above the sheets, with lids half closed shielding the eyes from the light. "I'm supposed to be asleep. Late night shift at hospital. They know I'm skipping breakfast."

"Will needs a favour as do I."

Zeller raised his arm and pointed to a closet. "Take the black one, it's too tight."

"I need a stronger blocker and I have an important meeting today."

"All your meetings are important, so you say." Zeller looked at the shirt Hannibal held up and nodded. "You've always taken the minimum dose, what's changed?"

Hannibal shrugged. "Less effective."

"You're not taking excess on purpose, are you?" Zeller could see his brother's blank expression. "Some Alphas deliberately overdose. Helps with erectile dysfunction, keeps you rigid for hours and increases knot size."

"I never dysfunction especially in the erection zone."

"You're so modest. Anything you're not good at?" Zeller yawned.

"Failure."

Zeller pushed himself upright and sat against the bed board. "Alana's a pain but she's right, if Will doesn't register soon, the police will get involved. When you were away, Will and I talked. He mentioned a problem with a doctor at Quantico. Could explain why he's reluctant to register."

"I will speak to Will when I return home from work. Hopefully I can persuade him to comply."

"Hannibal, if you're taking blockers because of Will then think again. You can't stay on them permanently and once you're off and you catch Will's scent, your body would over produce pheromones. When that happens it's Will who'll suffer. You'll send out conflicted signals, you'll draw him in and when you're back on the blockers, push him. away. You could shock him into heat, even false ones, repeatedly. Duals and suppressants aren't an option before a yearly cycle is complete, can cause infertility."

"Then what is the solution?"

"You either want him or you don't. There is no in-between. You either mate with him or he leaves."

Will saw the mouse running across the wooden floor to the corner of the room. He sat fascinated as the creature sat back on it's hindquarters to clean itself as if not to have a care in the world.

"Lost in your thoughts, William?" Robert had entered the sitting room and stood by the door.

"You appear to have a guest." Will pointed to the corner. "Do you have a mouse problem.?"

"They occasionally make an appearance if the doors to the outside are left open too long." Robert's feet followed the direction of Will's gaze and he looked along the floor. "I'm afraid my eyesight isn't as keen as yours. I came to apologise for my daughter's behaviour."

Will shook his head. "Hannibal already did that. It's water under the bridge."

"You do know you will have to sign up to a clinic, William. This decision is out of all our hands. Perhaps you should consider a private facility."

"I prefer being treated by someone I can trust. I'm not often sick and Abel just fixes me up fine."

"Not fond of doctors myself. All mine seem to lean towards vampirism, always compelled to take samples of my blood. I often feel I should bypass my doctor and just go straight to a haematologist. Alana can be bossy but her heart is in the right place."

Will spoke out loud the words constantly on the tip of his tongue. "She doesn't think I'm suitable for Hannibal. She won't say it outright but it's there."

"She's afraid his personality maybe too strong for you." Robert wrinkled his nose. "She doesn't know you at all."

Will saw the mouse dart towards the sunroom door followed by four others. "You definitely have a rodent problem."

Dinner had been a quiet affair with both Alana and Zeller absent and Hannibal had waited an hour after the meal before asking Will to join him outside. They had sat at the same table where days earlier Hannibal had apologised for his behaviour. As Will rested his hands on the table, Hannibal placed the folded paperwork directly in front of them. He delayed speaking until Will had flattened out the sheets and read the registration details.

"You have your reasons for avoiding the inevitable, I would like to hear them. As this is connected to your past, I am willing to an exchange of information."

"Quid pro quo." Will's reaction was muted when Hannibal nodded a response, just a whispered. "You first."

"My circle of friends included an intelligent and beautiful Omega. I was attracted to her, but because of a past experience I kept my distance. I was working near her residence when I received a call from her, she said she was going into heat and claimed a man was trying to break into her home. I did not think just hurried straight to her. There were no strangers on the premises so I tried to calm her but it was difficult, her heat began to take affect on us both. Then a mutual friend arrived, he attacked me, accused me of trying to rape her and we fought. At first I was defending myself but heat mania took ownership of us and I nearly killed him. I lusted for the Omega and would remove any obstacles in my path. I pinned him to the floor, my hands around his throat, when I heard the Omega screaming "kill him" over and over again. It was then I understood. I stopped myself from ending his life and ruining mine. It was her fantasy to see two Alphas fight over her, the winner taking her without permission. She had lured us both to her home for that sole purpose."

"Was your friend alright?"

"He recovered as did I. Our friendship did not."

"And the woman?"

"I later heard she fulfilled her fantasy."

Will took a breath, his gaze flickering to Hannibal then back to his hands. "When they took me to Quantico, I thought I was safe. Then Florida and Louisiana wanted me because of the money. It became a three way fight between the states and the FBI. Doctors were appointed to assess me, they were supposed to be independent. One became obsessed with the notion that I helped Hobbs, was part of it. I wore my mother's collar, she gave it to me just before she died, said if I wore it Hobbs wouldn't hurt me. It was the only thing I had left of hers, everything else had gone, been taken. Doctor Greenaway thought it symbolised my love for Garrett Jacob Hobbs, suggested I'd been his willing bitch. So they tricked me, sedated me to see if I'd been used. When I came round, they hadn't just taken my dignity but also the damned collar. I knew then I had no control over my life. I tried to run away and when that didn't work I shut down. Just broke."

"The doctors were they Alphas?"

"Yeah, all of them." Will kept his head down, not wanting the Alpha to see the emotion seeping out of him.

Feeling something between pity and protectiveness, Hannibal leaned forward placing his hands on the Omega's. "We must learn to put our pasts behind us, learn to trust one another. I care about you, Will and I do not want to lose you."

"I don't want to be lost."

"We will find a clinic with a Beta doctor, a woman, if it would make you more comfortable and nothing will be asked of you that will make you distressed. I promise I will stay by your side to ensure you are not hurt or humiliated."

Will's eyes caught the Alpha's. "Hannibal, don't make promises life won't let you keep."

"I promise we will find a solution. Besides I am not fond of the idea of going to prison, doubt the clothes would enhance my looks."

Will sat back laughing and as the truth slowly dawned on him, the laughter petered out. "If it comes right down to it, I'll go to any clinic. I don't want to lose you either."

Chapter 25

"You look like hell, Will." Zeller told the Omega

"I feel like it." Will replied as he followed his brother-in-law.

The noise from Hannibal's office caught their attention. The sound of his raised voice echoed down the hallway followed by brief silence then an eruption of words which to Will's ears were distinctly foreign.

"Must be bad, he's swearing." Zeller remarked as he entered the kitchen with the Omega behind. He pointed towards the coffee machine and Will nodded.

"Thought he didn't curse?" The Omega stood against the counter and watched as Zeller made the coffee.

"Lithuanian doesn't count in his book. Father's the only one who would understand him. I can catch the odd word or phrase."

When the door slammed both Zeller and Will looked towards the doorway and as Hannibal marched into the kitchen, Will was overwhelmed with the sensation to make himself seem smaller. Still ranting in Lithuanian, Hannibal accepted the coffee offered by his brother.

"Bad day?" Zeller's voice was lightly sarcastic.

"The fools wanted me to factor in project delays. I've explained I have, within the parameters of probability, but they want the unknown to be included. They do not understand if it is unknown, then you can not estimate the disruption or the amount of time rectifying the problem."

"There is a logic to your argument, brother."

Another round of expletives and Hannibal drank the coffee and with one glance towards the Beta staff, the women disappeared from the room.

"I have received an email confirming our appointment with Dr Tocca at her clinic. As you intend to be registered, I have contacted the Baltimore Omega health board and an investigation into failure to register will not be activated."

"I can imagine you having a mug shot taken, you'd insist on having your hair stylist present." Zeller laughed out loud as a scowl appeared on his brother's face.

"She's good isn't she? I mean, Alana said she's the only heat doctor around this area who's actually treated duals." With the appointment already booked Will felt anxious about the prospect of being examined.

"Gina Tocca is one of the best angynolists in the northern states and is very exclusive, probably the only reason you're on her list is because of your duality. Will, she's a top Omega Health specialist and has an active obstetrics practice, everything wrapped up one small package." Zeller enthused.

"Suppose she doesn't like me?" Will's pessimistic side took hold.

"She doesn't have to like you, Will. Look at it the other way, few male Omegas have duality, so you are rare. Trust me, doctors like having something different on the menu. Besides, I am sure Hannibal will use his natural masculine charm on her if need be."

"You and William seem to be on a better footing." Robert looked out towards the garden as dusk settled.

"We have agreed to exchange information. I share a moment from my past then he will reciprocate. Growing up I was taught Omegas were the weaker dynamic due to their gentle, submissive nature. The more I learn about Will's past the less Omega he appears to be. He is an enigma."

"You were always interested in puzzles when you were young, Hannibal. Whereas Valdas would give up within minutes, you would sit for hours until they were solved."

"You are suggesting I wish to solve Will. I believe I have barely scratched the surface. He is like a reed blowing in the wind, sometimes I hear your voice coming from his mouth, other times Zeller. I have yet to have a sense of the boy, who Will Graham really is."

"He has had many influences in his life but he will always return home. Will Graham is still the young boy growing up with his family in Louisiana, that part of him will never cease to exist. It is his anchor."

They both heard the raised voices, then the shouting. "Good grief, that sounds like your sister."

They strode to the hallway side by side hearing Will yell. "Well, here's the thing, it may be too hard a pill to swallow but I live here too."

"Will." The command stopped the boy in his tracks as he moved towards the staircase. A look of uncertainty crossed his face before he bolted up the stairs.

"What on earth is going on?" Robert stood still, perplexed.

"I was talking to him and then he snapped." Alana clearly agitated, shook her head in disbelief.

"What were you talking about, Alana?" Robert asked

"The Omega clinic."

"Go to him." Robert ordered Hannibal.

Will was pacing back and forth by the foot of his bed. Hannibal not troubling to knock felt alarmed as the words tumbled out of the boy's mouth. "She just blurted it out. Didn't give me a chance. That housekeeper was there and....and Alana was talking about me like I was a thing."

"Will, calm down." Hannibal moved nearer the boy, not too close to hamper his pacing but enough to make his presence noticed.

The boy stopped moving and stared into the Alpha's eyes. The tears streamed down his face. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, please, I didn't mean to shout. Please don't get mad."

Alana refused to move until Hannibal returned, her tight lipped expression told Robert anger boiled inside of her. "Will you please calm down, darling."

Alana listened to her father, saw the love in his eyes which always there for her and unclenched her fists. Hannibal descended the stairs, tension visible from his walk. "He says you spoke about personal matters in front of the staff, breeding, birth control?"

"Why would I say anything to scupper the appointment when I've been the one trying to make you go." Her voice rose on the last words.

"Will is anxious, he has hardly slept the last few nights. I am willing to believe words were your misunderstood." The concern in Hannibal's voice was obvious to both his father and sister.

"Omegas can act irrationally due to lack of sleep, they can display paranoia. He needs professional help." Alana's medical persona came to the fore.

"I intend for Will to see Gideon on his return as he is the only doctor he trusts. I am, however, open to suggestions."

"There is a sleep aid we use in the clinic for Omegas."

"I doubt if Will would agree."

"They dissolve easily, half a tablet in his milk will get him to sleep. But just this once, Hannibal, too many can cause side effects."

Sitting in his office sipping a brandy, Robert waited until Hannibal's mission was accomplished.

"He drank the milk. I will talk to him tomorrow, perhaps get a better understanding as to what happened." Hannibal said entering the office.

"There will be her version, his version and somewhere in between the truth." Robert kept his gaze on the garden, watching the darkness descend. "We agreed not to read the reports on the boy, to form our own opinions and not be clouded by others. I believe a change of heart is needed. Whatever ails William could have a link to his past and the sooner it is resolved the better."

Hannibal stayed by Will's side for most of the next day after re-arranging his schedule. They sat in his office looking at the plans for the new Baltimore and the new housing Hannibal would create. The boy had tried to disguise the headache but Hannibal could see his brow furrow and the occasional wince slipped from his mouth when trying to read the small print on a contract.

"Headache?"

"Yeah." Will gave him a smile which Hannibal recognised as an attempt to reassure. "I need new glasses. Put it on my forward planner."

Will requested a coffee, the kind only Hannibal could make according to the Omega and when Alana followed him into the kitchen, Hannibal guessed his sister's timing wasn't accidental.

"You know Will apologised."

"I did not make him, Alana, he was very remorseful this morning, took the blame. At least he slept well."

"He seems in a better mood, although it is difficult to tell with Will, so much lies beneath the surface. Anyway I shall be absent tonight as I have a date." She brought up her hand and playfully patted the side of his face. "I am dining with Charles Snell Morgan, the banker. You must remember him? Felicia's cousin?"

Hannibal remembered the air of arrogance which haloed the Morgan family members. Remembered the exhilaration when he extracted himself from Felicia's world and from being shackled to a mannequin."

"She always asks after you. You made a beautiful couple."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the figure then caught the scent. "Your coffee is ready, Will, I will bring it to you." Hannibal gave Alana a smile and whispered. "Tell her to move on. I have."

Another day, another sunrise and Hannibal could see with one glance the dark rings under the eyes, the sallow skin. "You did not sleep last night?" He asked.

"Yeah, a bit. I think. I'm catching up during the day."

"Will, this cannot go on. If you do not get a good night's sleep, when Gideon does returns, I doubt very much, he will have a patient to treat."

"I'll survive, I always do." Will said without enthusiasm, his nails leaving white trails over his upper arm as they clawed his skin.

Hannibal saw the movement and grabbed his arm, inspecting the area. "You have a rash. It is clearly bothering you. It will need to be treated."

"Perhaps you should ask for a refund. Looks like you got damaged goods." Will's attempt at humour was met by a strained look on the Alpha's face.

"I will ask my mother to care for you, I have to work late."

"No surprise there." Will murmured as they made their way to their breakfast.

He didn't have to be told, the second he caught Robert's look, he recognised the signs. Sympathy, curiosity, perhaps doubt all rolled into one. Will was positive Robert would bide his time until he was prepped. He would call Will into his office, sit him down and start a conversation about the dossier. He knew it would happen but the uncertainty of when made it more daunting.

Bedelia's hands were soft and as she dabbed the salve onto Will's arm, it was the touch a mother would give a child. He had responded to her touch by closing his eyes and now she had finished her task, his eyelids were reluctant to open.

"Take a nap." She encouraged him by removing his shoes and lifting his legs onto the couch. Will wriggled a bit to get comfortable and with his head resting on a cushion, the tips of her fingers slowly traced a circle on his brow until sleep welcomed him.

Robert touched her arm as she carefully closed the door as she left the sitting room. "We need to talk."

"I was about to suggest the same." She said as she followed him to his office. "I am considering taking Will away to Sutcliffe house for a few days. A change of environment may help him and he would also have the companionship of another Omega."

Robert walked to his desk, picked up the dossier and held it towards his wife." I would like your opinion. William has a susceptibility towards touch sensation deficiency coupled with the fact the boy was nocturnal during his captivity to stave off the predators. Could these combined explain his current condition?"

"You've googled his symptoms haven't you, Robbie?" Bedelia huffed.

"I am worried about the boy. He looks gaunt." He sighed as he sat down. "I warned Hannibal about his decision to enter into this marriage, his attitude towards Omegas leaves a lot to be desired. I thought William would change him but it would appear it is the boy who is changing and not for the better."

"I do wish you would leave the diagnosis to the professionals, last time you were poorly and searched the internet, you thought you had either diabetes or rabies. After I have read this" Bedelia tapped the folder "we will talk to Hannibal together. Donald will be here tomorrow so we will discuss relocating Will temporarily."

"Is your mother with us tomorrow?" Robert asked casually as he picked up his pen.

"Not until Sunday, the Blooms are visiting tomorrow, hence Donald's visit."

"As long as the Blooms cannot breach our security gates, I shall remain calm." A smile blossomed on her husband's face. "Please have them checked."

Bedelia was almost at the door when she stopped, an emotional unwillingness to ask was overridden by her compulsion to assist. "Is there anything in these reports which would make me turn away from the boy?"

"If you are asking whether I think less of the boy, then no. If you are asking if he did everything to survive, then yes. Given his age and the circumstances, I would have done exactly the same, except as an Alpha my actions would have been universally praised. He, however, as an Omega acted against type. They expected him to curl up and die. I suspect there lies the reason for the hostility. He's the Omega who outsmarted the Alphas."

A black void encased him, no stream, no stars, no air. He was gasping for breath, kicking and flailing in nothingness. His eyes closed, throat constricted and his hands clawed at his neck to loosen the rope. A breeze blew against his face and Will sucked in a lungful of air before screaming.

The first scream and Hannibal was awake. The second scream and he was hurrying into the adjoining room. With just the half light from the bathroom, he found the switch and saw the blankets being kicked off the bed by the boy's thrashing. Seizing both arms, he shook the boy.

"Will, wake up."

The gasping was followed by a struggle as the boy tried to free himself. Hannibal pulled the boy into an upright position, finding himself looking into eyes full of dread.

"What, what happened?"

"You were having a nightmare." The Alpha observed the boy's neck and the deep scratch marks.

"They were choking me, I couldn't breathe."

Nothing more was said. Will harbouring guilt for having woken Hannibal kept quiet and fearful the Alpha would be angry, lay back down. Hannibal, taking the hint, did not pursue the matter and left.

"I will be back later." Hannibal called out to Bedelia as he put on his jacket, walking to the front door, the car keys jangled in his hand. "I am meeting with a few colleagues for an informal lunch but will return by this evening."

With a cursory "See you later, Will" the Omega let out the deep sigh he had been holding inside, feeling an emotional lurch watching the Alpha depart. Robert kept Will by his side and again Will suspected the whole situation was pre-arranged. With the arrival of Donald, everything livened with Will enjoying the in-depth conversations between the two Alphas about latest scandal to encompass the political world and the impish humour Robert interjected into the discussion.

"I'll get the coffee." Will had offered and as his hand touched the handle of the office the darkness briefly engulfed him.

Will saw the lake and the trees. The man who could have been Hobbs but wasn't Hobbs was standing to his left. He blinked twice, looking around in total confusion, expecting to see the door to Robert's office and his salvation. As the man moved Will ran in the direction of the house, or what should be the direction of the house, if his mind wasn't tricking him. Hearing shouts from behind and from his side, he picked up speed, never straying from the path. The shouting became a chorus of "stops" and "Wills" chanting in his head. As the house drew nearer, Will felt exhilaration course through his body as his feet pounded the ground in time with the beat of his heart, feeling so alive, so uncoiled. *SLAM* a man was on him, catching him, the ground tilted skyward as he was yanked sideways then down.

"*Don't shoot. Don't shoot.*" The voice screamed "*He's a Lecter.*" Hands grabbed his arm and he was pulled to his feet. Matthew's face moved to centre stage with a "*What the fuck, Will. They nearly shot you.*"

The questions came thick and fast with no answers. He couldn't find an explanation for his actions. He couldn't tell the agents why he had decided to go for a run without informing them, why he had chosen the one area he had been warned not to venture and why when the agents had repeatedly called upon him to halt, he had continued to run. He couldn't find any answers and the harder he tried, the more his mind swirled in a miasma of confusion. Matthew had been the bluntest.

"You fucking idiot, they were going to shoot you. Didn't you fucking hear them?" He shouted.

When Will just shook his head, Matthew gripped his arm and almost marched him back to the house.

Chapter 26

Donald received the news before Will entered the house. The senior agent in charge of Donald's safety, one of the men prepared to take a bullet for their President, had spoken in hushed tones. Matthew still by Will's side looked at the President and when the signal was given, left the room. Bedelia fussed over Will, glossed over his momentary lapse.

"It's hard to follow all the rules when Donald's around." She soothed, worried by the Omega's general appearance.

"You went to get the coffee, Will, that's all. Nothing was said about going for a run, not coming straight back." Donald was as plain speaking as Matthew, almost abrupt.

"I just left the office and was gone?" Will's words betrayed any attempt to offer up a plausible explanation.

"Robert and I thought you'd met Bedelia, been side lined."

"I've, I've not been sleeping, not thinking straight. I'd, I'd decided to get back into shape, so it must've been one of those things. You know, thinking about one thing while doing another." Will fought desperately to sound in charge of his mental faculties. He didn't believe the words out of his mouth either but was becoming accustomed to bending the truth. Lying had become easier.

"You're probably right." Donald smiled and could soothe as well as his sister when confronted by a skittish Omega. "You have to try and understand, Will, these agents are not trigger happy. If one of them had shot you, killed you, it would have stayed with them for the rest of their days, even ruined their lives."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm sorry." Was all the boy could produce, not minding Donald had spoken to him as if he were a small child. He looked towards Robert who had sat silently throughout, waiting for some reference to his past. The man pursed his lips before speaking.

"If you don't mind, Will, next time I will fetch the coffee. It will be less dramatic." The boy relaxed, a shy grin on his face and huffed out a small laugh, relieved the man had used his humour to diffuse the situation.

Donald had tracked Matthew to the stables exit where the Beta, off duty, stood just over the Lecter boundary. Donald's escort held back, close enough to protect but under strict instructions to ignore the interaction between the President and Brown. Matthew didn't overreact to the approach, inhaling the final hits from his cigarette, he took a small tin from his pocket where the stubbed out remains were placed and snapped shut the lid.

"What happened with Will?" Donald wanted the truth served plain with no dressing.

Matthew shook his head, as he looked into the distance, recalling those moments. "He just ran, wouldn't stop how many times they called out, shouted out. I could see the endgame if he didn't, stop that is."

"So you tackled him."

"It was lucky I was so close."

"Lucky for Will. It would have been a kill shot."

Matthew chewed on his bottom lip thinking about the prospect. For once he looked directly at Sutcliffe, sensing he was there for more than confirmation of the report he had already received.

"He's not the same. He's different."

"Different how?"

"He's dropped weight, looks washed out and the scent, his scent has changed."

"I don't notice scents. Blockers. So what's different"

"I've smelt Omega fear plenty of times and Will was afraid but his scent wasn't citric." Matthew pulled his head back trying to identify the smell. "It was metallic."

Hannibal enjoyed the company of his colleagues, their shared adventures and the ambience which surrounded him when relaxing with friends but when he received the call, he had excused himself without hesitation to drive back home. He had experienced a trace of resentment over the influence Will was beginning to exert over his life, but the thought of the Omega's death had Brown not acted, profoundly disturbed him. He liked the boy, felt pity for him and at times enjoyed his company, but the Omega was enveloped by difficulties which the Alpha hadn't foreseen. Then there was the spark of defiance which was bubbling under the surface and Hannibal, when completely honest with himself, liked to see it flare up, to witness how the Omega handled himself, to see how he handled the Omega.

The boy was in the end room transforming it into his own retreat from the world. As Hannibal mounted the last few stairs and turned the corner, he could see the boy pulling up an area of the carpet, using the box cutter to separate it from the larger section.

"Will." The boy jumped and scurried on all fours, twisting until his back was against the wall, knees pulled up to this chest. The Omega was fearful, eyes wide, the cutter still in his hand, tightly gripped.

"Will, I did not mean to startle you." Hannibal stood rooted several feet away, alarmed by the actions of the boy, waiting for him to calm.

"Are you angry with me?" The boy asked, his eyes still wide and Hannibal accepted it was the authentic emotion Will would expect from this Alpha.

Hannibal took a breath before replying, studying the boy, remembering the boy's panic. "No, not angry. Concerned."

"I pulled you away from your friends."

"It had drawn to an end naturally. As I said, I was concerned so came back home. Do you need help?"

Will was mystified, unable to decipher the exact meaning of the Alpha's words then noted Hannibal was looking at the floor. "Oh, your mom said I could rip this up. It's moth eaten, or something eaten. Could be mice."

Hannibal advanced now the boy had recovered, holding out a hand. Will instinctively went to take it with his right before feeling the cutter in his hand. Closing the blade and flicking the safety switch he held out his left and was pulled to his feet. "It's more difficult than I thought."

"May I?" Hannibal pulled at the tip of Will's protective gloves and the boy immediately took them off. Tight on the Alpha they still covered most of his hand and as Will moved out of the room, Hannibal took his place. He started at area where Will had already removed a section of the carpet. Bending over he tugged and the carpet ripped from it's holdings. Given its age the material offered little resistance and soon the room was clear. Will grinned and punched the air with his fist before thanking Hannibal.

"Your mom said I could paint the room any colour and I got to get the light fixed and....." Will trailed off before ducking his head. "and I wanted to avoid the others because of what I did."

"You do not want to be reminded of it, so you find a reason to withdraw."

"I didn't want to talk about..... yet."

"Then we will be silent on the matter."

Will had made it through dinner without incident, the others conversed and he would occasionally join in the best he could. His eyes were transfixed on the festival of colour which emitted from every item in the room, the vase gifted from an aunt in Lithuania, the floral arrangement, Bedelia's dress, everywhere their vibrancy danced around him making him smile. The kale revealed the fractals in nature as he gazed at his dinner plate before the wall paper secured his attention. The sweet peas climbing into diamond shaped patterns, green leaves with pink flowers shone brilliant and intense. As the kaleidoscope behind his eyes slowly stopped rotating, Will's world returned to grey.

Bedelia had carefully worded the suggestion as they sat in the sitting room. She would go with Will for a few days to Sutcliffe house, explaining a break from the routine may be beneficial. The response had caught her off guard, teary eyed Will's bottom lip began to quiver.

"This is my fault." He whispered. "You're supposed to go to New York, I heard you talking, you were excited."

"I want what is best for you, Will." She had replied.

"I want you to go, to have a good time. I've caused enough trouble."

Bedelia brushed his hair from his face with her fingers, taking in his sad features, troubled by his childlike tone and when she agreed she had been looking forward to her trip and would now go, his face lit up with joy. Hannibal observing the whole interaction emotionally shifted from concerned to uneasy, not recognising the boy sitting next to his mother on the couch, a boy who was one hundred and eighty degrees adrift from the Omega he had first met at the sanctuary.

The agent stationed outside the door knew the drill, an appearance by Will then Donald would be informed. They sat around the sitting room as Robert read extracts from the file.

"He's not likely to wander downstairs is he? I can imagine Will would be upset if he discovered he was being discussed behind his back." Bedelia said

"Do not worry other, he will sleep through the night."

"What have you done, Hannibal?" Alana sounded alarmed.

"I gave him the other half of the tablet."

"I told you not to do that. You can't keep sedating him, not only is it unethical but potentially dangerous." Alana's anger stemmed from not only her brother's actions but his indifference to her words.

"Could the boy's problems be touch deprivation. According to Chilton, Will suffered periods of .... what were his words....." Robert turned the pages "oh yes, periods of despondency and childlike behaviour."

"The symptoms of touch deprivation vary with each Omega depending on the circumstances, whether it is spousal denial or family division. The loss of his family may account for any childlike responses but the conditioning he received at the hands of Hobbs should have produced a certain amount of distrust towards all Alphas. I cannot say that I have noticed any hostility towards myself, in fact, the reverse would be true." Bedelia hated it when Robert delved into her territory.

"If Agent Brown is correct and Will's scent is metallic that could be a stress indicator." Donald added.

"Or a dietary imbalance." Zeller interjected. "Not everything has to be a non physical reaction."

"You won't accept a psychological problem." Alana sniffed.

"I won't rule out a physical one. He's been working in the garden, possible allergic reaction to plants which could account for the rash on his arms and neck." Zeller continued. "Hey, didn't the Fosters use insecticide on occasions?"

"Home made remedies, they were against anything that wasn't produced by nature." Robert murmured as he read through the reports. "Although it is possible the plants could cause a skin reaction, I had that problem with the sap from one of those plants. What was it's name?"

"Will needs a proper assessment by a qualified doctor not someone with an on-line diploma." Alana stated. "There are excellent facilities which specialise in Omegan instability other than our clinic."

"He will not be institutionalised." Hannibal glared at his sister.

"He could be treated as an out-patient." Alana replied

Donald could see an argument brewing between the siblings. "You would need his consent for out-patient treatment. After what Hannibal has told us about Will's experience with Alpha doctors, that would a problem."

Bedelia was reluctant to offer the suggestion. "We could take him back to the Sanctuary for treatment."

"Chilton would keep him." Hannibal spat out.

"Hannibal is right, if Frederick Chilton knew about Will then I could imagine him rushing to court to have the marriage annulled." Donald added "He's not fond of Hannibal."

"And Gideon won't tell Chilton once he sees Will?" Alana spoke in a sarcastic tone.

"Doctor patient confidentiality, Gideon would abide by it." Donald turned to face his niece. "I know you do not respect the man, but Abel Gideon was an excellent surgeon."

Hannibal shrugged feeling his time had been wasted. "So here we are, back at the beginning. The boy is suffering and we have no idea what is the cause."

"Heat?" Zeller spoke directly to his brother. "You said you noticed his scent was much stronger. If Will is being pulled into heat, he would be overly attentive towards you, react uncontrollably to your touch. If you rejected him he could become irrational."

Hannibal shook his head. "Except for the scent, Will has always shown control."

Robert turned the pages of the report once again. "There is something here from Chilton, yes, there was discourse between the parties over a Dr Greenaway. According to Greenaway, Will was deceptive, a cohort of Hobbs and the good doctor even recommended Will be incarcerated in the Baltimore Hospital for the Criminally Insane before being extradited to Louisiana."

"Will told me the doctor was hostile." Hannibal made a mental note to seek out Greenaway.

Robert continued. "Yes, apparently both Jack Crawford and Chilton agreed it was Greenaway who had the problem. Crawford's report is explosive, he claims Greenaway was addicted to Will and made sexual comments about the boy. Addicted is an odd word to use. Ah, yes this is it. Dr Chilton's letter to Crawford."

Robert shifted in his seat. "What Will has is pure empathy, he can assume your point of view or the point of view of those around him. Will's ability enables him to understand the thought process of individuals to such an extent he can mimic them. It is well documented that duality attracts certain types, narcissists are especially drawn to the idea of an Omega being created in their own image, willing to tend to their every need unconditionally. During captivity Will used his imagination to escape the horror around him, creating his own virtual reality. Will could lose himself in this world if left alone for long periods of time, therefore it is feasible he could be susceptible to outside subliminal influence."

"Will could be seeing himself through our eyes and adapting his personality to try and fit into our family. Unfortunately as we may have different perceptions as to who Will is, this in turn could create an identity crisis and possible breakdown."

"Then what is the solution, mother?" Hannibal asked.

"I suggest we must all take a step back from the boy with the exception of you, Hannibal. He must be allowed time to find himself and you must be prepared to listen to him. As you have no emotional relationship with the boy but seem to have reached an understanding, you have a better chance to discover how he really sees himself."

Robert got up out of his chair. "After all the trials he has gone through at the hands of our dynamic, if I were young William, I would arm myself to the teeth and shoot the first bloody Alpha who came within fifty feet."

Hannibal followed Zeller's lead and poured himself a brandy as the others went their separate ways. "You went into silent mode."

Zeller took a sip from the tumbler. "What the hell do I know? I just work in a general hospital, don't have a world renowned mentor like my sister or work in a prestigious clinic like my mother ."

Hannibal understood his brother's resentment. "You do not run with this herd."

"Just don't ignore the obvious, Han. Will's been to hell and back and someone like him would not fall apart because he's living with the Lecters. We're missing something."

The voice in his head told him not to trust them, he could never trust an Alpha, but then it was Jimmy's voice and Jimmy proselytized his prejudice. The voice persisted, accusing him of being like other Omegas, having an exaggerated respect for Alphas due to their greater physical and mental strength. Will was in no mood to argue, finding truth in some of

the words but unwilling to accept Jimmy's overall picture of his world. He reviewed the previous day's events, his actions and reactions, conceding he was no longer Will Graham but a faded reproduction. He believed in the Lecters, needed to believe in them but the nagging tone continued. He wasn't behaving like himself, didn't feel like himself. Once Jimmy's words took hold shouting someone was doing this to him, then he knew he couldn't escape them, anymore than he could outrun the belief that Garrett Jacob Hobbs would eventually reclaim him or kill him.

His bedroom was normal as was the daylight which had flooded in, no cascading colours, but the anger inside him was not. He needed to exhaust it, deplete himself of it until he was tempered and docile. The very Omegan qualities Hannibal Lecter despised.

Hannibal had been attentive at breakfast, asking if he slept well and managing a soft smile. Will requested black coffee and toast and although the change in his breakfast habits hadn't prompted any comments, even from Hannibal, he was aware of the eyes on him, watching his every move. Will ground down the feeling to shout at the Alphas, screaming until they looked away.

"Can I use the pool today?" He directed the request at Hannibal and could see he had caught the Alpha by surprise.

"Of course, there are no restrictions on use. May I ask why, as it is somewhat different to your usual routine."

Will briefly diverted his gaze to Donald then back to Hannibal. "Probably safer than jogging."

He tested the water before diving in, a habit reinforced both by his father and Frederick. Will would have felt uncomfortable waltzing through the house dressed just in trunks and robe, so having found there were changing facilities, he disrobed and once pulling on his trunks stepped poolside into a reality of his making. He dived into the water, arms and legs coordinated as he practically glided through the water. Having measured the distance in his mind by the second length of the pool, he executed the perfect flip turn propelling himself underwater before hitting the surface. Lost to the rhythm of his body, he obliterated the anger by increasing his stroke rate until in his mind he was looking down at himself, visualising every kick, every arm action. As fingertips pierced the water, Will's compulsion to swim even faster took over, pushing every thought out of his head, making his body movements purely automatic.

Immediately Robert had mentioned Will had gone for a swim, Hannibal felt apprehensive. He watched the boy for some time standing near the entrance, prepared to duck out of sight if everything proved uneventful but as the time passed and the Omega showed not signs of slowing, Hannibal felt his heart rate quicken. The first time Will broached the surface, Hannibal had smiled, the boy had swam an impressive distance along the bottom of the pool after his turn. The second time, Hannibal held his breath as the boy disappeared under the water, moving closer to the edge when he felt the time without air was too long. The third time he had toed off his shoes and unclasped his watch, placing it carefully on the

ground, waiting. When the boy finally appeared above the water he was clearly in difficulty. Hannibal heard the gasping for air alongside the coughing and had dived in without hesitation still clothed. His powerful build meant within a few strokes he was alongside the Omega pulling him into recovery position and swimming to safety. He let him grasp the side of the pool for a moment, still coughing and spluttering, before guiding him to the stairs. On dry land, Will wheezed until all the water had left his airways. Hannibal stood above him, feet apart, dripping water and as the Omega looked up, he saw the anger.

"What were you playing at." Hannibal yelled and the Omega flinched at the sound.

"I'm sorry, I got lost inside my head, I'm sorry." The words were Will's only explanation.

"Sorry trips so easily off your tongue, I often wonder if there is any sincerity behind it." Hannibal continued to shout.

The sobbing came from nowhere, the sound of an angry Alpha had always produced the flight or stay out of sight syndrome in Omegas but unable to run, Will was reduced to cowering on the tiled floor, his hands shielding his head as if expecting to ward off blows. The onslaught was pitiless with Hannibal's temper turning from a reaction to Will in danger to infuriation when the Omega had subjugated himself.

"What the hell." Donald's voice came from behind him. "Stop it, Hannibal, stop shouting at the boy. He's terrified."

Will hid in his room for an hour lying foetal position in bed, blankets completely covering him. Donald's intervention had stopped the shouting and with Hannibal ordering him to his room, Will didn't hesitate so rose quickly and ran. He could hear the voices downstairs, Bedelia's raised higher than the rest with a ***"When will you learn"*** and the Omega prayed this hadn't been directed to Hannibal, fearing the consequences if it had.

With Donald demoted to onlooker, the confrontation between Hannibal and Bedelia came to an abrupt end. Robert had exited his office on hearing the commotion and seeing the staff moving about in the kitchen pretending to be busy, he took control.

"This should have been a private conversation not one for general consumption. In future all matters relating to the boy will be conducted in my office." Motioning them to enter, he shut the door behind them with a quick glance towards the staff.

"Everything we discussed last night was just thrown overboard. You cannot control your temper around this boy." Bedelia assumed her role of psychologist.

"He nearly drowned. How am I supposed to act?" Hannibal lowered his voice, partially due to his mother's influence and the awareness the whole incident had been witnessed.

"You wouldn't let up, Hannibal. If I hadn't been there, God knows what would have happened. He thought you were going to hit him, for God's sake. So did I." Donald spat out.

"I was wrong, I agree, but in the moment....." Hannibal shook his head, shocked at his loss of control and by his uncle's words.

"You are worried about the boy as he is your responsibility therefore I can understand your response, but if you do care about the boy, you will always have to take into consideration his past treatment at the hands of Alphas." Robert spoke softly, intent on maintaining the peace.

Hannibal took a moment before answering, absorbing his father's words. "I will go to him, make amends but he will have to take his share of the blame. Will cannot be given a free pass every time he puts himself in danger. It has to stop."

"And precisely how will you handle the boy?" Bedelia asked, her voice edged with concern.

"If Will wants to behave like an Omega then I will treat him accordingly. If you will excuse me, I am somewhat in need of dry clothes." As Hannibal left, the others understood as Will's Alpha, Hannibal had taken the matter solely under his control which left both Bedelia and Donald harbouring a feeling of trepidation.

Will heard the Alpha in the next room, heard the sound of the pipes when the shower was used, the doors opening and closing. He had been told to go to his room and had followed orders, now unable to leave in case he angered his Alpha yet again. Hannibal didn't bother to knock, setting down the tray of milk and cookies on the dresser, he closed the door.

The bed depressed as Hannibal sat on the edge, pulling back the blankets Will didn't attempt to hinder the Alpha's actions. Hannibal saw the boy's arm cover his face and felt a jolt realising how small the Omega was in comparison to himself.

"Will, sit up please."

The Omega obeyed albeit slowly but kept his gaze downwards. Hannibal leaned forward and in a calculated move placed his hand against the boy's face, his thumb gently caressed the boy's cheek. A look of surprise registered in the boy's eyes when they met with Hannibal's and as the man continued his ministrations, Will began to respond moving his head so Hannibal's thumb ghosted over the Omega's lips. The Alpha moved his hand slowly down the slender neck until he reached the left bonding gland, gently massaging the area. Hannibal monitored the response, saw the look of apprehension leave the boy's face to be replaced by one of serenity. Hannibal's hand stilled then pulled away a little, the Omega exhibiting a quiet desperation moved towards the Alpha to make contact with his hand again.

Will looked deeply into Hannibal's eyes, confusion written across his face. "Is that just something you thought I wanted?"

"I am trying to calm you, show you have nothing to fear."

Will pulled back suddenly feeling used. "There's no dignity in this. You're only touching me to see how I would react, no to see if I react differently, not because you want to touch me."

"You have the ability to see people, now use it on yourself. You are not the same Will Graham I met a few weeks ago. I am worried about you."

Will recognised truth in the man's words. "I'm confused about who I am. I don't feel like myself and I'm not sure why?"

"Do you feel unstable?"

Will heard Alana's voice and smiled. "Your sister's diagnosis of me."

It was Hannibal's turn to smile. "Your behaviour is erratic and I need to know if you will survive until Gideon's return. If not I have it in my power to obtain medical help for you."

"By committing me to a facility for unstable Omegas."

Hannibal was taken aback, hearing the phrase Alana used the previous evening. "Yes."

"Read the dossier, see what they did to me. If I end up in one of those places they'll diagnose me with something and they'll be wrong but they'll keep on diagnosing me and they'll keep on being wrong. They won't let me leave and they won't let you take me out."

"Then let me assist you. Start eating, no running or swimming and you are to stay inside the house for the next few days. Let someone watch over you. Do not fight this."

Will knew he would have to bend to gratify this Alpha, as Hannibal would not yield. Yet the act of trying to please could create hostility between them as Hannibal Lecter was a difficult man to satisfy specifically if you were an Omega. Will nodded his agreement and Hannibal broke into a smile. "I feel protective over you, Will. I want a strong and healthy Omega, not a beautiful disaster."

Kade had arrived in good spirits, Matthew by her side carrying her large knitting bag, but as she took her seat next to Will at the dinning table, a change in attitude became apparent. She looked intently at her fellow Omega, gently stroking his face.

"You're thin." She whispered to him.

"Just a bit run down." Will replied

She shook her head. "Something isn't right."

"Are you feeling unwell, mother, you seem a little upset." Bedelia asked her Omega mother.

"I'm fine." The Omega snapped. "He is not."

The woman seemingly calm, watched as the meals were served. "Why is my boy having something different."

"Will doesn't eat much meat so he is having the fish instead of the bourguignon" Bedelia replied.

"This isn't right." Kade chattered. "Something isn't right."

"Mother?" Donald began to feel unsettled by his stepmother's uncharacteristic behaviour.

"What are they doing to you?" Kade clasped Will's hand.

"Doing to me?" Will kept his eyes focused on the woman by his side, a chill running down his spine.

"Doing to you." She nodded her head slowly as if the action held a secret meaning. She moved closer and began to sniff around his neck.

"Mother, leave Will alone." Bedelia could hear the panic in her own voice.

Kade released Will's hand and grabbed his shirt collar, pulling it away from his body. "Your skin, your poor beautiful skin."

Will's breathing became faster as the women's agitation level increased. Grabbing his arm, she brought it to her nose and inhaled. "Your scent is wrong, your scent is all wrong."

Hannibal put a hand on Will's shoulder and as the boy turned to look at him he asked. "Do you want to swap places."

"Leave him." Kade hissed. "Don't you dare take him away from me."

She took up her fork and speared a piece of the fish from Will's plate and popped it into her mouth. Her face contorted almost immediately and she grabbed her glass, drinking the wine rapidly.

"It's disgusting. I'm not letting you eat swill." She exclaimed as she grasped the bottle of wine next to Zeller and poured the contents over Will's meal before Zeller wrestled it from her.

"You stupid woman." Robert shouted. "What on earth is wrong with you."

"It's you, isn't it, it's definitely you." She shouted back.

Robert looked to Bedelia in desperation. "Do something."

"It's you." Yelled Kade pointing her index finger at Robert. "You evil lizard faced bastard, you're the one poisoning my boy."

Chapter 27

Kade sat arms crossed glaring at Robert who responded in kind whilst remonstrating with her.

"I can assure you I have not been poisoning William, however, if I ever felt inclined to indulge in such activity, you would be my first victim."

"Robert, how could you say such a thing." Bedelia scolded her husband.

"This silly woman has just put ideas into the head of my son-in-law and judging by the way he is looking at me, they have clearly resonated. I now have two crazy Omegas glaring at me." Robert found it difficult to keep his anger in check.

Hannibal squeezed Will's shoulder but when the Omega redirected his gaze towards the Alpha, he could see a change in the boy, Will's eyes were full of suspicion. "Will, you must not take notice of grandmother's words. Her fantasies are for her alone and should not affect your relationship with this family."

The eerie smile did not belong on Will's face and the unnerving effect it evoked caught Hannibal off guard. "Will?"

Hannibal gripped the boy's shoulder harder and shook him. Sitting straight backed the boy's head drooped a fraction and Hannibal could see a change of expression on the boy's face. "Will?"

When he looked at Hannibal the suspicion had lifted, substituted by confusion. "I kinda got lost."

"Mother, this is ridiculous, nobody is hurting Will." Bedelia said

"Lizard." Kade threw her insult at Robert.

"Dingbat." He retorted.

"Stop it, the pair of you, you are acting like children." Bedelia felt exasperated.

Kade reached out and pushed her plate away from her. "Not hungry."

Hannibal took hold of Will's plate. "I will get you something else to eat."

"No, I'm, I'm not hungry either." Will blurted out.

"I cannot allow you to starve, you must eat." Hannibal insisted.

Kade turned her attention back to Will, stroking the side of his face with the back of her hand until she gained his attention. "I have Omegan fancies, do you like them?"

"Don't know an Omega who doesn't."

Kade pushed back her chair and rose regally. "I need milk and vanilla beans, you do have vanilla beans don't you."

Hannibal was already out of his chair and by the woman's side, offering his arm. "I will escort you to the kitchen and assist you."

After they had exited, Robert seized the opportunity to speak. "William, I give you my word I would never consciously act against you."

Will could see the man was dismayed. "I know you wouldn't, sir."

Hannibal poured the milk into the pan and added two sliced pods. "Grandmother, I would appreciate it if you do not fill Will's head with your thoughts, I wish to protect him from negative influences."

Kade censured her grandson. "You can't see it and you won't see it until it's too late. Don't say I didn't warn you."

Kade took the packets from her knitting bag and placed them on the table. "I have three flavours, strawberry, cherry or blackberry. Which do you prefer, Will?"

"All of them."

Kade laughed and set out four from each packet onto the large plate. She took one of the finger shaped cookies from the plate and dipped it quickly into her milk, before biting off the end, keeping the cookie upright. "There is an art to eating them, perfected by Omegas over the years." She spoke as if giving a lecture.

Will took one and copied her actions, closing his eyes as he bit into the outer shell. He nodded his head in approval as he savoured the cherry.

"These are delicious" Kade announced "and untainted."

Eating his second, Will had been oblivious of the eyes on him but as he sucked the filling off the tips of his fingers, he saw Hannibal studying him.

"I'm out of practice." He told Kade as she picked up her third with pristine hands.

Both Will and Kade managed four biscuits each before they were satiated, the elderly Omega insisting the boy keep the remainder for later. For a while they were silent, both caught up in their own Omegan world until Will made the request.

"May I name you?" He asked shyly unsure of the woman's response.

"Of course you may, my darling." Kade beamed.

"Well, I loved both my Grandma Graham and my Grandma Cassini and you remind me of them. So may I name you Grandma Kade."

Kade pulled Will close until their noses touched and both sat quietly before she slowly pulled away. "It will be an honour and a privilege to be your Grandma Kade."

Will sat on the couch after the visitors had left, happy to listen to Robert talk. Explaining to the family the meaning of the naming ceremony and using his wealth of historical knowledge, Robert was informative and entertaining recounting the variety of Omegan ceremonies he had witnessed over the years.

"Once married an Omega would select names for the in-laws but only the elders. It could take years and the titles would be carefully chosen as they would express how an individual was emotionally perceived by the Omega. Obviously Will sees Kade in the role of a grandmother. Just imagine if I was an Omega, when I married your mother I, too, could have named Kade." Robert trailed off smiling.

Hannibal returned to the room and offered the mug to Will. "You need sustenance, Will."

Will took the milk and saw on the plate Hannibal held the remaining fancies. With a grin Will took a cookie. "Guess I haven't eaten much. Could force down another one or two."

He heard the voice through the blankets and held on tightly when they were tugged again. "Go away."

"Will, are you awake?" Lulled into a false sense of security hearing Zeller's voice, Will relaxed his grip to find the blankets yanked away and Zeller sitting on the side of his bed.

"Are you awake, Will?" Will felt the fingers drumming on his brain in time with Zeller's words as he pushed himself into a seated position and when trying to answer discovered his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. As he struggled to swallow he heard the snap of a seal and took the bottle of water extended to him by his brother-in-law. Once his swallow reflex began to work he downed the contents unable to quench his thirst. He looked around for more fluids to find Hannibal on the other side of the bed offering another bottle which went the same way as the first.

"Why d'ya wake me?"

"It's gone ten and if you weren't fully awake this morning, you'll be on the way to my hospital."

Will tried to make sense of his words. "Why?"

"What's the last thing you remember?"

Will attempted to access the memories through the fog engulfing his brain. "Your dad talking, oh and eating fancies."

"That was Sunday." Zeller stated.

"Yeah, that's right, with Grandma Kade."

"Today's Tuesday." Zeller's succinct approach worked and Will became totally focused on the words. Hearing Zeller fill in the last thirty seven hours was surreal for Will, having no recollection of them at all.

"So, I was belligerent." Will said once the man finished speaking.

"Hostile would be more accurate. Told me to fuck off more than once. Just wanted to keeping reading your book. Took us a while to realise you weren't turning the pages."

Will was cringing inside wondering how he had spoken to Bedelia and Robert. The silent Hannibal shifted position and entered the discussion. "You refused to eat or drink anything that did not come from a sealed bottle or packet. Mostly you would only ingest ginger ale and dry crackers. Look at your arm, Will, you scratched yourself raw."

For the first time Will was aware of the dressing on his right forearm and had a sinking feeling inside when unable to recollect being treated. "I guess part of me believed Grandma Kade." He offered up.

"Will, I'd like to run some tests."

"I'm not going to be psychoanalysed, Zeller." The Omega snarled.

"Not those kind of tests." Zeller placed his medical bag on the bed and opened it. Taking out a small container, he handed it to Will. "I need a sample of urine."

"Great, you wake me up to get me go pee in a cup." Will yawned as he swung his body around and got off the bed.

Zeller closed the bag with a sense of satisfaction now Hannibal was supporting his decisions and Will was complying with every request."

"Surprised you didn't baulk at giving blood." The doctor said.

"Doesn't bother me." Will's manner was matter of fact. "I just pretend I'm somewhere else. Besides, I've got an incentive, I want answers."

"You seem more responsive this morning. Blood pressure normal, temperature a little high. Besides the rash any other symptoms."

Will thought about playing down some of them, but decided against it after Hannibal spoke. "We need the truth, Will. I have moved all my appointments for today in order to care for you."

"I don't feel like myself, I feel like I'm fading." Will admitted.

"How long has this been going on?" Zeller asked.

"The last week." Will laughed at the absurdity of his reply. "Well, I think it was the last week but I've been losing time. I get headaches too, bad ones. Sometimes I just have to keep moving, other times I'm too tired to move. I've got a lot of anger inside me over nothing and my sense of smell and taste, it comes and goes."

"Any other symptoms, thirst, heavy perspiration, dizziness?"

"I'm a dual, not much body hair, I always sweat. Anyhow I thought y'all made a diagnosis." Will slipped back into his accent. "Overheard a few things. You talk loud in this quiet old house." A snippet of conversation flashed in front of his eyes. The truth hit him hard and he gasped out the words to Hannibal. "That's why you touched me, to see if I was going into heat."

Hannibal looked uncomfortable, almost shame faced. "I am sorry, Will. I wanted to rule out the possible onset of your heat as a contributory factor."

The atmosphere of the house seemed to have lifted and the hustle and bustle surrounding Bedelia and Robert's departure reminded Will of his early days at DuMaurier house.

"I've pulled the nightshift so I'll be here part of the day, any problems just wake me." Zeller told Will. "Alana will be covering a couple of afternoons so it won't be just you and the staff."

"Mother and father will be back on Friday. I have decided to take a short break from work so will also return early that day. If you feel well enough I would like to show you my town house and make arrangements for the transfer of your horse to our stables. It would give us the opportunity to ride together, if you so wish." Will looked delighted and Hannibal took pleasure in the boy's delight.

Robert pulled Hannibal aside before leaving. "He seems quite well. Please watch over him, he responds positively whenever you give him your attention."

"I will keep him safe, father, I promise."

Will had drifted through the days after Robert and Bedelia left. Sitting on the couch listening to the wind buffeting the house and the rain lashing against the windows, he recalled the one day he had felt normal, as if he could really gauge what constituted as normal anymore. Naturally it didn't last long, the next day he was being tended to by Zeller, who after making the strongest coffee in the world, shuddered as he watched Will drink it neat.

"How can you drink it? The taste."

"Can't taste it." Will replied, his headache slowly diminishing after the second cup.

Alana kept her promise, sitting with him for two afternoons, insisting they watch syrupy television dramas about Omegan rights. Against all odds, Will found he had enjoyed the programmes and the company.

"Does this house have a mouse problem?" He had casually asked her.

"Seen the occasional one. Why, are you musophobic?"

"No." Will hummed, accepting he was hallucinating, as he watched the army of rodents run up the walls and halfway across the ceiling before they dropped onto the floor below. "Just thought I saw one."

Zeller inadvertently set the wheels in motion. The storm had lengthened the spacing between flights and the crash on the I road had meant delays into the city. Bedelia had contacted him as soon as they had landed, confirming they were on their way home. Zeller had made a flask of strong coffee, setting it down beside the Omega seated in the sun room.

"In case of headaches. You must like watching storms, Will, you've been looking out this window for an hour."

Will smiled, mesmerised by the bright orange lawn and purple sky. "Yeah, nature's fascinating."

Hannibal called. "The meeting has been delayed, so I will be a few more hours. Heard from mother?"

"Yes, they're back..."

"Sorry, Zeller, they are ushering us in."

The trees were twisting and bending in the wind and Zeller drove slow and steady, lights on full, hitting every bump. The road weighted down by the vehicles avoiding the blocked I, he decided to angle across country using the back roads. He had reached the outskirts of the city, when Bedelia called again.

"Where are you?."

"About ten minutes away from work."

"Alana's staying in the city with her young man. I can't reach Hannibal."

"Talked to him. He's pic...." The car jolted as it found the pothole. "... up Will."

"Oh good, that's one less worry. Take care, darling."

Bedelia relaxed against the seat and closed her eyes. "Zeller is close to work and Hannibal has picked up Will."

"Now you can cease worrying." Robert said as he looked at the gridlock ahead. "We may as well stop at Sutcliffe house and wait until this rain eases. We are going nowhere."

"You need the bathroom, don't you, Robert?"

Alana's plans were ruined with the return of the storm, the disruptions to the airline schedule left Charles Snell Morgan with no option but to postpone. She had intended to drive home but after turning the engine over repeatedly with no effect, she made her way to Chandler Square, spare key in pocket. Her mood brightened when she saw the light coming from the house.

"You are soaked." Hannibal had said when she made her way to the kitchen.

"Car trouble, I need a bed."

"Does mother know you are not returning home.

"Spoke to her earlier when they got back. That smells good, enough for two?"

"The roads are still treacherous so I have decided to stay here and yes, there is plenty."

"You have told mother."

With perfect timing the phone buzzed and Hannibal looked at the message.

Are you safe.

"Mother is worrying." Hannibal immediately tapped in a reply.

Staying at Chandler. Preparing dinner. We will see you tomorrow.

Will had to empty his bladder, the ache had become unbearable and as he shook out the last remnants, he closed his eyes. He was back on the couch, soft hands pushing back his curls, soft words being whispered. Another blink the room was dark, his hands gripped a mug, mouth full of cookies he drank what had been offered. The wind was whistling and he could imagine it was calling his name. It was his name, a high pitched voice was calling out over and over *"Will, Will"* He reacted, goose bumps on his skin, cold fingers gliding down his

spine and as he rose to follow the sound he heard the clang of metal on metal coming from the walls and could feel the ground vibrating with every thump.

The hallway was dark except for the light from the lamp and as he looked down the long, dark passage he thought he could detect movement. As the lightning slashed through the sky, his vision was enhanced, seeing no one in his sightline but feeling the eyes on him, looking down on him. As he moved his head to his left he saw the bottom half of the figure standing on the stairs. His heart was racing, pounding against his ribcage and he knew, just knew, every Omegan instinct screaming, he should run. The figure was female, he could see heels, bare legs, the hem of the skirt resting on the knees. His fear had immobilised him except for his eyes and they were fixed. He couldn't look any higher, didn't want to see the terrible visage or his heart would stop. He was safe as long as he didn't move, it didn't move but in his imagination he could envisage the creature slowly dipping, forcing him to view it's hideous features. The walls were still clanging, the ground pulsating but it was when the knees suddenly bent that Will turned and fled.

Robert hadn't objected when Donald suggested an agent drive them home in a more suitable vehicle. The roads were difficult in good weather but anticipating flooded hollows along the route, Robert felt more confident being transported in a Cruiser chauffeured by an experienced evasive technique driver. The house was almost in darkness save for the LED oil lamp resting in the recess of the window. The agent had led the way and as the key turned in the lock, Robert could hear the all too familiar clanging of the pipes as they entered the house.

"The water system." He explained as the agent's hand went to his holster. "The pump is overloaded."

When Robert flicked the light switch and nothing happened, Bedelia had picked up the lamp and hurried to the kitchen, turning the water on full.

"Power outage. The generator isn't operating." As Robert fumbled in the darkness trying to find the closet, the agent's hand illuminated the darkness with the aid of a flashlight. Robert chuckled. "You are a very capable chap. Every home should have one."

"Part of the training. All eventualities." Came the reply.

Robert opened the closet door and studied the dials and switches, pulling down the red lever, the house came alive. He led the way to the kitchen, hearing the water spluttering as the air forced it's way out of the pipes

"Do you want me to check the premises?" The agent was speaking and without thinking Robert nodded in agreement. He would be loathe to admit it but entering the DuMaurier house shrouded in darkness always chilled Robert to the bone. When the agent returned satisfied nothing had been breached, they said their goodbyes. Robert poured himself a

brandy and looked out of the window unable to shake off the sensation something was terribly wrong.

As he parked up in the driveway, Hannibal remarked. "I will bill you later. Dinner, bed and breakfast and of course fine company, it will be quite steep."

Alana huffed as she got out of the vehicle. "As you have insisted I use Mapp Vehicle Recovery Services, I think we're even."

"Ardelia's sons are doing well. It is good to see youngsters start off on their own and I give assistance wherever I can."

Kicking off her shoes as soon as she was inside the foyer, Alana made her way to her bedroom in need of fresh clothing. Hannibal glanced around the sitting room and hearing a one-sided conversation from Robert's office, surmised his father was talking on his phone. Bounding up the stairway, he knocked on the Omega's door and receiving no reply he opened the door to see the bedroom unoccupied, the bed neatly made. He was halfway down the stairs when Bedelia exited the kitchen.

"Where's Will?" Hannibal called to his mother.

Bedelia stopped, hearing her son's voice. "I haven't seen him. Didn't he go upstairs with you?"

"His room is empty, perhaps he has gone to the stables. I need to finalise the details to transport his horse. Did he mention it at all whilst I was gone?"

"Gone?"

"Yes, last night, I wondered if he may have mentioned it. If he was still agreeable."

"He wasn't here last night, Hannibal, he was with you."

Hannibal shook his head, trying to comprehend the situation. "Alana stayed with me not Will. When I spoke to Zeller, he said you were back."

"The airport, yes, not home. We didn't arrive here until late. The message you sent, you said "we" and I thought.....Oh God, where is he?"

The panic began to rise to the surface as they searched the house, Alana hearing the disturbance, joined them. Robert stood silently in the hallway as Bedelia disappeared into the kitchen to question the staff.

Her facial expression when she returned said more than words. "Mrs Brady was the last to leave. Hannibal, she said Will was sitting on the couch waiting for you. She was concerned about leaving him, but he assured her that you were on your way home. He said that you had promised him and you always kept your word."

Hannibal hurried as soon as she stopped talking, through the sitting room, out onto the terrace, the others following him.

Bedelia watched as he cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled **"WILL"** holding her breath, while she waited for the boy would answer. Hannibal ran along the pathway, stopping, then repeating the action over and over and over **"WILL" "WILL" "WILL"**

Lisa's first love had been Hannibal, she had fallen when she had seen him prowling the upper hallway, muttering something foreign, wearing just his jeans. Barefooted and bare chested her eyes had run the full length of his torso, wishing it had been her fingertips instead. The smirk on his face told her she had been observed and she returned the smirk full Omega, glancing up at him through her long lashes. Of course her infatuation didn't last. When Zeller had asked her about her ambitions, she related how being a college dropout she regretted her foolishness, making amends by working three jobs and saving enough money to re-enrol and correct her mistake. He had been impressed and encouraged her, finding scholarships she should apply for, although they both knew Omegas were placed at the bottom of the applicants pile. With his dark hair, blue eyes and kind nature, she knew she was smitten but then came the Omega and she found her true love. His dark curly hair and blue grey eyes captured her heart, but his slender form and wonderful scent sealed the deal. Only working two days a week, their relationship was spasmodic, but as they passed each other in the hallway, their brief conversations were meaningful to her. "Hi" he would say and she'd say "Hi" back.

Lisa's mother had been the Lecters part time cook until Mrs Lecter had decided to go up market and hire someone fancier. She couldn't blame the Lecters, they wanted one who was prepared to work long hours, cook all the types of food found in the finer restaurants and her mother couldn't accommodate. When Lisa needed work, her mother had spoken to Bedelia or Mrs L as the Lake family called her and Lisa had been hired to be Bedelia's personal maid. Later, when she had proved to be a hardworking, trustworthy employee, cleaning Mr L's office had been added to her schedule.

Lisa saw the boy failing week by week, a little less weight, the complexion turning sour and then slumped at the bottom of the second staircase, head resting against the rails. Helping him up and guiding him to the sitting room, she navigated him onto the couch. She pushed his damp curls away from his face and saw the helplessness in his eyes. Bringing him a tumbler of water, he drank greedily.

She had been told but didn't believe. However, catching his scent, she had to investigate and her mind assumed war footing. She left before the storm hit and cycled the path back to her home. She paced, waiting for her mother to return. She knew her mother would warn her

against any action, telling her the Lecters must know what they were doing. Lisa was past worrying about reputations or retaliation from the family, caring only for a young Omega in distress.

As advised, she arrived at the Omegan hospital after the morning rush, having spent the previous night in a fitful sleep, rehearsing her words in her head every time she woke. She waited patiently for one hour which became two, then after another thirty minutes were added, she returned to the reception area and spoke loud enough to ignite the interest of every one within earshot.

"Tell Dr Lecter if he doesn't see me now, I will go to the cops."

Ten minutes later a bewildered Zeller escorted her into an office, arms stretched wide, he shrugged. "What are you doing here, Lisa?"

Ignoring the seat offered, she pushed her hands into her pockets and in a voice both clear and steady she asked. "Why are you drugging Will?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Zeller snapped out.

Lisa didn't flinch, pulling out her phone, she studied it for a few moments before reaching her goal. Offering it to Zeller she scrutinised his features as he looked at the photos. "I'll rephrase my question." She said defiantly. "Drugs are being added to Will's food without his knowledge. So is he really insane and is this the only way to get him to take his meds? Or is it some sick attempt to make him go crazy?"

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bedelia leant back until her shoulders touched the wall in Robert's office, arms crossed and with a pensive look on her face, Robert anticipated further developments.

"Donald is sending a small detail to help look. He could have dispatched a larger team but we both agreed this could attract the wrong sort of attention. Donald also mentioned that mother was not herself on Monday. It would seem she was very drowsy and somewhat disorientated. She sat for hours staring into the distance."

Robert digested the words. "Very similar to the boy's condition."

Bedelia took in a sharp breath. "Too much of a coincidence?"

"Unless there is an outbreak of an Omegan virus which turns them into zombies, then no. This warrants a careful and discreet investigation."

Bedelia sighed. "Where is he, Robbie? He's been gone for so long, anything could have happened.

Robert quickly was at his wife's side, pulling her into an embrace. "He is a survivor, Bedelia. William has gone through so very much in his short life and yet he always overcomes. He is resilient. A quiet but powerful young man."

"He's a boy, Robbie."

"A remarkable boy."

Walt Foster had slipped his jacket around Will and his arm around his jacket to keep it in place. For once Foster ignored the rules, taking the direct route across the lawn to the DuMaurier house. Alana saw them first, calling out to the others. Hannibal half run towards them when Foster first shook his head to serve as a warning. The Alpha travelled at a slower pace but Foster shook his head again. Hannibal understanding, took several steps back and let them pass without commenting.

"He needed a lot of cajoling to get him back. He was in the stables, cut his arm when he broke the window to get in." Walt removed the jacket from the boy and set him down in Robert's chair. Bedelia was immediately at Will's side and gently lifting his arm and pulling back the torn material, could see the gash which transversed the forearm. "Alana, I need the medical kit."

As Hannibal walked towards the group, Foster held up his hand, palm facing the Alpha. "He seems to have a bone to pick with you."

Hannibal, making no further attempt to advance, watched his mother undo the buttons on Will's shirt and manoeuvre him out of it. Will smelt of horse and wood shavings, with flecks of hay stuck to his curls. Alana returned with the kit and handed it to her mother, unable to take her eyes off the Omega.

"Did he spend the whole night in the stables?" The question wasn't intended for one specific individual, more a reaction to the thought of the Omega being alone.

Foster filled in the gaps. "Seems that way. When you said you were looking for him, me and my boys set out towards the lake, heard about what took place the other day. When I saw the stables and the broken glass, I put two and two together. He was curled up on the hay wrapped in Baron's blanket, not that your horse minded much, probably glad of the company. When I told him I would take him back to the house, that's when he kicked up a fuss."

"He resisted?" Bedelia was taken aback.

"So to speak." Walt continued. "He sure has a wide vocabulary. He can curse in a northern and southern manner."

"You left me. Didn't come back for me." Will spoke as soon as Foster had left, Hannibal taking the man's position in front of the Omega found himself staring into dark eyes. "I didn't know what to do. Then, then I heard the noise, that god damn noise. They were hitting the bars and I, I knew they were looking for me. They couldn't find me so they sent her."

"Will, what are you talking about?" Hannibal tried to stay focused.

"Last night, or whatever damn night it was that you left me. I was scared, she was on the stairs. I ran and kept on running. It was so cold. Kept hoping you would find me."

"Who was on the stairs?"

"She was. Abigail was." Will rose from the chair and began to pace back and forth "She was gonna kill me, said she would after what I did to Mc.. Mc.. McGreevy."

"Will, no one was here."

"Have you been drugging me?" Will looked directly at Hannibal.

"Will, let me explain...." Hannibal began

"Tell me, have you been drugging me?" Will yelled.

"William, I can assure you..." Robert interjected.

"Don't lie to me, please don't lie to me." The Omega pleaded.

"Yes." Hannibal announced. "On two occasions I gave you a mild sedative. But...."

"You did this to me. If you didn't want me why not tell me. I'd have packed my bags and gone."

"Will, if you would just calm down." Hannibal gradually moved closer to the boy. Will twisted around and started to the door, his foot landing on the edge of the rug, it slid away from him and he fell sideways connecting with the wall, first with his shoulder, then the side of his face.

Crumpled on the floor, he raised his head and in a voice filled with hate he yelled at Hannibal. "Fuck you, fuck all of you Alphas. You're all the fucking same." Will pushed himself off the ground and half stumbled out of the door.

Hannibal strode to the meditation room seeing door slam shut as he reached the top of the stairs. A turn of the handle and push against the door was met with resistance and he knew Will was leaning into it the other side. He crossed the hallway to the bathroom and grabbing the chair by the vanity, he returned setting the chair down, back to the door.

"I will sit here until you are calm. You do not have to speak but I will not leave until you do."

His mother-in-law's arrival had tested Robert's patience. Kade had been insistent in her need to see her little Omega and what Kade requested, Kade received, as far as Robert was concerned. Alana had distracted the elderly Omega persuading her to help clear an armoire in one of the guest bedrooms much to the others relief.

"She'll be there for hours. We have placed the old photograph albums in the room and she will lose herself in them." said Bedelia

"Will?" Donald asked.

"Leaving him in the house alone has not improved matters. We do not know him well enough to tell if his behaviour is totally out of character. It is hard to accept we have failed him so profoundly." Robert heard the thunder rumbling in the distance. "And I doubt if that will lighten this evening's mood."

"I need the bathroom." Were the first words Will spoke after two hours of silence. "Please, I need to go now."

As Hannibal stood up and removed the chair he called out. "No locks, Will, you can close the door but do not attempt to lock it otherwise I will take action."

The tone of the voice was enough to make Will comply. Will did as requested, then showered, dressed in the most presentable clothes he could find and shook. Hannibal had reached out to touch him but Will pulled back sharply.

"Don't touch me." The quick flash of distress on the Alpha's face compelled Will to explain. "My skin, it's sore."

The boy was quiet, answers confined to yes or no and offered little more.

"Will, Kade is here to see you. If you cannot face her it will be better if we made an excuse."

"I'll be fine, just need to get my head straight."

"You need food, when did you last eat"

"I'm not hungry." The boy lied.

"The noises from your stomach say otherwise. If you are reluctant to accept anything I would offer then my mother would gladly prepare something light for you. You may watch her prepare it."

"Yeah, okay, I'd like that."

"Will, when this is settled, I promise you we will get your Dreamer and bring her back and I will cook for you some of the best meals imaginable. You have my word."

Will just looked at the floor, bit his lip and nodded.

Bedelia was glad to see Will functioning, guiding him into the kitchen she gladly provided the strawberry shake and shortbread he requested. He had been intrigued by her apron and was touched when she told him she, alone, would prepare his evening meal.

Donald and Robert kept him company though he did little of the talking, his attention being drawn to the windows and the sound of the rain.

"You don't like storms then Will?" Donald chanced.

"I'm fine with them, just didn't like the other noises."

The transformation was subtle, Will constantly turning to the windows as the storm began to rise, then extending his arm, he rotated his open hand as if inspecting it.

Donald was perturbed. "Will, are you alright."

"I'm fine." He replied dreamily "I just like watching them drop from my hand."

"What do you see?"

"Mice." Will giggled. "They're everywhere, running up and down the drapes, across the ceiling. They're so small and fast."

Robert shivered glancing around to see if the vision Will had described held any substance.

"Do you see us, Will?" Donald asked.

The Omega glanced towards the man. "They're all over you, running up your arms, on your head."

As Donald opened his mouth to speak, Will groaned. "It's in your mouth.... the tail...." Will gave out a strangled cry, his hand then clamped across his mouth as he rushed from the room.

He reached the downstairs facilities where his stomach was purged of it's contents. Due to the exertion of vomiting, when he stood upright, tears rolled down his face. He flushed the toilet, swallowing repeatedly trying to keep control as his world shifted on it's axis then slammed back into place. He found the basin, blindly turning on the faucet before splashing water over his face and into his mouth. Heart pounding and hands shaking, he sought escape and returning to the hallway, at the far end he saw Hannibal.

In his peripheral vision, Will saw the figure and making the kitchen his focal point, he saw the truth. Head tilted to one side revelling in his pain, the smirk was unmistakable and behind on the counter, was placed the carton. As the blade swept across as he closed his eyes, the past began to play and when he forced open his lids, she was still staring at him, eyes locked on his filled with hatred. He walked stilted toward Hannibal, breathing deeply and nearing the foyer door, he bolted, pulling one door open then the other until he was out in the rain. The gates were open, the lights coming closer but with only one chance, adrenaline kept him running.

Zeller listened to Lisa appalled. The images didn't lie neither did the young Omega standing opposite him. "We didn't sanction this." He held out the phone to her in disbelief.

"No one questioned it, but I'm Omega, I know what this stuff can do. You're going to help him, right?"

Cressby had a reputation, considered by some to be apathetic, Zeller had never experienced that trait. In charge of lab testing for the last ten years, Zeller's respect and admiration for the Beta showed, so when he asked for express testing on the widest spectrum possible, Cressby never quibbled. The lab was busy but Cressby always pulled out the stops for an admirer.

"I was just finishing the report when you called." He held out the sheet of paper. "The usual baby makers, high levels of mexadrone and of course, getting yourself so knotted, you take the old benzodiazepine to knock you out. Your guy has also indulged in party poppers namely mescaline. Zee, you know this is reportable, if he works in a hospital..."

Zeller shook his head and continued looking at the results. "The um, er clothing, anything?"

"Yeah, didn't really need to test it, one of the Omega technicians recognised the smell, but we tested anyway. Laundry detergent, industrial strength. I've heard of Alphas taking scent blockers to enhance the knot but, Zee, this guy's got a problem."

"He's an Omega, Will's an Omega."

"For what reason would an Omega take blockers?" Cressby exclaimed.

"He didn't take them, they were forced on him." Zeller took the report and headed to the pharmacy.

The full force of the storm hit minutes from home, now at a reduced speed, Zeller hit the steering wheel hard with his left hand out of frustration, regretting not calling them earlier. Chastising himself for having self doubt and the need to see the evidence before he would accuse. The agents on duty cleared him and as the gates opened wide enough he drove through, the security floodlights coming into action. The figure was running at him and he slammed on the brakes, slight and agile, Zeller recognised Will. Unbuckled, the Alpha was out of the car as the Omega tried to pass, catching Will around the waist the two pirouetted until Hannibal joined the fray. They each took the struggling Omega by the arms and frogmarched him back to the house.

The gates whirred to a close and Matthew rocked from side to side undecided.

"Stay out of it, Brown." The senior agent had barked. "That crazy sonofabitch Omega is none of our concern,"

"Like fuck." Matthew spat out and sprinted towards the house.

They pulled the boy into the dining room, spinning him round, Hannibal pushed down on his shoulders making him sit in the chair. The Omega's whimpering was louder and pitched higher, the natural reaction by any desperate Omega, an attempt to alert a family member or friends of his plight. Zeller out of breath blurted out.

"He's been drugged."

Robert and Donald hearing the commotion were entering the room when Zeller took out the report from inside his jacket practically shoving it in his uncle's hand. Colliding with Matthew as he left to go back to his car, Zeller barked out.

"I'm going to need you."

Kit and gloves in hand he returned to the group. Alana, drawn downstairs by the noise, watched bewildered as her brother placed his medical bag onto the dining table. Bedelia following the activity was gently pushed to one side as Zeller scooted by to begin the hunt.

First kitchen, then laundry room he gathered the evidence with Matthew one step behind, witnessing the discoveries. Finally returning to the dining room, he spilt the contents from the tin onto the table, placing the detergent alongside.

"Get her"

Zeller gave a brief summary of the events which had transpired since the morning. Donald passing the report to Bedelia sat suspended in disbelief. Mrs Brady had stood calmly after Matthew had brought her to the room, his hand gripping her arm as he would any suspect. Zeller had thought out his approach but when faced with the housekeeper, someone so ordinary she could be passed in the street and not be observed, he could only say one word as he pointed to the evidence.

"Why?"

"It's ripping my little family apart. It set brother against sister, mother against son. It's evil."

"He's a kid, an Omega, harmless."

"It's an aberration, a disgusting freak of nature. It should never had been born."

"Why blockers?"

"I had to show you it's violent nature, you had to see it was too dangerous to keep near my ladies."

"You gave him a drug which made him aggressive. You were responsible for his anger." Zeller yelled.

"Of course you defend it, you are ensnared, you fought with your own brother to see who would taste it first."

Zeller stood speechless as Robert took control. "You have endangered this boy's life and you will face criminal charges. We are giving you the chance to explain your actions."

"You are the guilty one. Keeping it by your side, allowing my mistress to be usurped. You tried to hide your unnatural desires, but you, you were weeping in your pants for that filthy whore, I saw the stains, smelt the lust."

"What do you mean stains, what does she mean?" Robert turned to Bedelia.

"You tried to kill the boy" The normally calm Donald bellowed. "You gave him a hallucinogenic."

"Omegas keep their insanity in the shadows. I just drew the filth's into the light."

"And this" Zeller shouting, pointed to the laundry detergent. "was this a little something extra for him to remember you by?"

Brady turned to Alana smiling. "You couldn't see beneath the surface, so I had to peel off it's skin."

Hands tightly fisted by her side, Bedelia screamed. "Get her out of here, get her out of my house now."

Donald motioned to Matthew. "Keep her in the foyer." Then touching Robert on the arm whispered. "I'll contact Reynolds, get her secured."

Robert rose out of his chair. "It would be better if I contacted Reynolds. It would be inadvisable to leave a trail from you to the director of the BSHCI."

The figure in the doorway hesitated. "What, what's going on in here, I heard shouting."

Alana moved to the elderly woman's side. "Everything is fine, grandmother, just fine." Arms linked Alana steer her towards the stairs.

"That's all I need." Robert muttered under his breath as he followed them. "Another cuckoo."

Hannibal had stood behind Will, his hand resting on the boy's shoulders, feeling the boy shaking, flinching at every word thrown at him. Moving in front of the Omega and bending down on one knee, he pushed back the sweat soaked curls from the boy's forehead.

"Will, listen, listen to me, we will make this better, make it all go away."

"What do we do now." Bedelia's voice was shaky and her legs felt weak.

"Neutralizer." Zeller took a vial from his bag and emptied the liquid into the nearest wine glass. "It will clear his system. Empty his room, clothes, bedding everything. The food, we can't trust anything that isn't sealed."

Approaching the boy carefully, Zeller held out the glass. "Will, you need to drink this, it will help." The boy instinctively pulled back his head with an emphatic shake of the head.

"Please, Will." Bedelia implored. "It will make you well."

Through the haze and confusion, the Omega tilted his head towards Bedelia and softly pleaded. "If.. if I'm good, please may I go home."

Bedelia broke a little, a tear flowed down her cheek. "Of course, of course you may."

Hannibal took the glass from his brother and holding it to the boy's lips felt a wave of relief when he began to drink. When he had finished, Hannibal reached across for a napkin and gently dabbed the boy's mouth. Zeller brought out a bottle from his bag and handed to Hannibal. "He needs to wash, head to toe. The lotion will remove any detergent residue and help repair the skin."

Bedelia imposed her own brand of martial law. The women gathering linen and towels, Zeller supplying clothing and Donald and Robert assigned to removing items, they descended on Will's room. Hannibal struggled with the Omega, having pulled him into the Alpha's bathroom, he found the boy uncooperative, twisting whilst Hannibal tried to undress him. The Omega resorted to crouching in a corner making it impossible to proceed and the attempt by Hannibal to subdue him by pressing on his bonding gland turned the whimpering into an ear splitting whine due to the Omega's compromised scenting ability.

Capturing the boy in an embrace, back against the Alpha's chest, Hannibal spoke in dulcet tones. "Will, you must trust me, I am trying to assist you. You are safe, I promise, I will keep you safe."

Standing under the warm water, Will made no attempt to move, cursing in Lithuanian, Hannibal kicked off his shoes then tugging off socks, stood beside the Omega and began to wash the boy's hair. Meeting no resistance he continued down the body, the Omega compliant almost lost in a trance. As Hannibal applied the lotion to the boy's groin, tenderly cleaning the compact balls and mound of black pubic hair, he could not resist muttering.

"Another time this would be considered foreplay."

Satisfied the boy was clean, he turned off the water and wrapping him in Bedelia's luxury towels, gently rubbed him dry. Grabbing the clean boxers and undershirt, he dressed the boy and lead him back into his bedroom.

Hannibal savoured the whisky. Relaxing in the chair, eyes half closed, the imagined deserted beach and warm sun faded as his mother joined the family.

"I have put your dryer back in your room, mother. And yes, the boy's hair is thoroughly dried."

"You have kept a light on in his room, Hannibal?"

"Yes, mother. He was practically asleep by the time I had changed into dry clothing."

"What now?" Asked Zeller before taking another bite of his chicken sandwich.

"First we should give thanks to those at Sutcliffe house who have provided us with enough food for the next two days and of course, to those agents who have removed that hateful creature from our premises." Robert sighed, tired from the events.

"And Will?" Alana asked.

"Can he make a full recovery without being admitted to hospital?" Robert glanced towards Zeller

"The neutralizer will take effect immediately, his sense of smell and taste will come back with a vengeance. He'll jump from great rushes of energy to despondency, he'll sleep off the valerian over the next forty eight hours and I've put fresh dressings on his arms. The hospital can't do anymore than we're already doing."

"Then we will watch over him for the next few days until he is his former self." Robert announced.

"We should notify Chilton." Alana said

"We should absolutely not involve Dr Chilton. It is in our best interest for this nightmare to be contained within the walls of this house."

"Surely Dr Chilton has a right to know, he would want to support Will." Bedelia protested.

"I am sure he would support William, he would also have a duty to report this matter to NOGA and they, my dear, would decimate us. NOGA consists of some of the most richest Alphas in the world and they are committed to their Omega charges. These men are not just altruistic, everyone to a man is the son of an Alpha sire and an Omega carrier, an Omega who at some point was discarded by their mate. You could not comprehend the extent of their influence. The fact a member of our household harmed this boy is such an atrocious manner would not be forgiven. What do you think will happen to you, Donald, impeachment.?"

"Hell, based on the evidence I'd vote to impeach me."

"And you, Alana, next time there is a crowd of Omegas outside your clinic, they won't be there for treatment, no they will be barricading the doors with you inside as they burn it down. And Zeller, how would you react when your Omega patients cry out ***""here comes Doctor Death."***

Robert took a deep breath and sat forward. "And you, Hannibal, how would you fare. Do you seriously believe your dreams to rebuild Baltimore will survive. Much of this has to fall on your shoulders. You brought him into this family knowing, because of his past, there is a certain naivety and sensitivity to him yet you treated him at best with disdain and at worst cruelty. I warned you not to marry him and have never believed you would be good for William and was concerned your relationship would prove to be toxic. So here we are, at crisis point."

"What do you wish me to do, father?" Hannibal asked.

"Make William want to stay. To paraphrase one of my favourite songs, make it romantic, make it up I don't care, as long as the boy is happy and remains part of this family, we will weather this storm."

Will had often dreamt of the night Georgia escaped. She had plotted everything down to the smallest detail. Since being relocated to the basement, she had searched the entire room looking for weaknesses. When Hobbs brought back the gut rot whisky and the contraband taken from the moon shiners, she knew the time had arrived. By late evening the gang were drunk or halfway there and it was Abigail who had checked on them before rushing back to her man.

"I'll get help, Will, I promise." Georgia patted her jacket pocket which held the notebook. "You've gotta be brave, dad would want it."

She held out her fist and smiled. "Lioness."

Will placed his against hers. "Mongoose."

The third fist was absent, neither was there the musical "Gazelle" ringing in their ears, Marissa had always sung out the pet name their father had given her.

Georgia had hugged him and kissed him. "I'll save you, Will, that's what big sisters do."

Climbing up the makeshift building blocks made of out a chair and old suitcases she reached the window and opened it. Looking back and whispering "Love you, goose." she disappeared forever.

Will always woke at this point, before they discovered, before they hunted her down, but this night was different, this night he followed her.

Robert had drunk a little too much brandy, trying to numb the drama of the day. As he made his way to the kitchen, taking just three steps into the hallway, he saw the figure moving towards him and gave out a little scream of surprise. Donald not far behind was more in control, turning on the main light he watched Will shield his eyes with his hand. The boy stilled before lowering the arm and taking a few faltering steps forward.

"Will, Will." Robert called out and when he received no response began to move until Donald grabbed his arm.

"He's sleepwalking." Donald pushed open the door to the sitting room, softly calling out to his nephew. "Hannibal, quick."

Will had stopped again, his head lifted and as Hannibal stepped out into the hallway, the boy's head turned towards the incomer. The Omega appeared tranquil as he inhaled and exhaled, then without warning he ran back up the stairs. Hannibal gave chase and as he reached the top of the staircase saw the all too familiar sight of Will closing shut the door to his room, Hannibal not hesitating shoulder charged it open. Grabbing the Omega and pulling him out into the hallway, the Alpha reacted as teeth bit hard into his forearm. Slamming him against the wall with little effect, Hannibal dislodged the boy by a single punch to the side of the head. Both immobile, the boy on all fours, the Alpha towering above him, the cold breeze from the open window hit them both and the boy sprung into action once again.

Hannibal had anticipated the move, chasing him down as Will's foot hit the oak chest beneath the window. As the boy leapt upwards grabbing the frame of the open window, Hannibal had grasped both his legs. Shouting out for assistance and with Donald coming to his aid, Hannibal bracing himself against the wall took one step onto the chest and prising the boy's hands open, he lifted him bodily to the floor. Arms pinned behind his back and forced into a kneeling position, Will squirmed until Donald squatting in front of him, cupped his face.

"Your name is Will Graham. Say it." The boy, silent, tried pulling his head away from the firm hold.

"Say it, Will. Say your name." Donald repeated.

"My name is, my name is Will.....Will Graham." Came the faltering reply followed by a look of awareness in the eyes.

The respite didn't last long as the boy began to struggle and with Zeller now standing to his left, Hannibal took control of the situation.

"Get him into his room." Hannibal instructed his brother and as both men grabbed the boy and pulled him upright, a foot lashed out at Hannibal. "Watch his mouth, he bites as well."

Fighting them every step of the way, the Alphas hadn't found the process easy but once pushed face down on his bed with Hannibal using his body weight to secure him, some of the fight seemed to leave the Omega.

"Top drawer, my room, the ties." Zeller's reluctance showed until Hannibal snapped. "Do you want him to climb out of a window and fall to his death."

As his brother carried out his order, Hannibal pressed his mouth to the boy's neck and began to suck on the gland. The boy attempts to buck the Alpha from him were futile and as the scent from the Alpha and the reaction to gland manipulation took effect, the tension drained from his body and he became dormant.

"Did you have to?" Zeller couldn't hide his contempt as he handed his brother the ties.

"What would you have me do?" Hannibal began to secure the boy's wrist to the post of the headboard. Satisfied he would not be injured by the fastening, he repeated his action a second time.

"Are you going to leave him like this?"

"I shall stay with him, I should be able to keep him calm. Wait here."

Zeller having no time to protest as he brother left, listened to the Omega breathing deeply, watching as the eyelids occasionally fluttered open, only to slowly close again as the boy sighed. Hannibal returning with tumblers and a bottle of water placed them on the dresser before walking into his room. Zeller could hear him rummaging in a closet before reappearing with a bottle of whisky. Locking the connecting door behind him, Hannibal poured himself three fingers and stood looking down at the boy whilst sipping his drink.

He's a fighter." Zeller almost laughed, glad that the day was nearly done.

"He is a survivor." Hannibal murmured.

Hannibal locked the bedroom door after his brother left and finishing his drink, he lay down beside the Omega. Laying on his side, he pulled the blankets over them, then nose pressed into the Omega's curls and with their breathing synchronised, his mind drifted back to the beach.

The banging on the door pulled him out of his dream and hearing his mother's voice, he wearily he made his way to the door and unlocked it. Hannibal had opened the door just a fraction when the figure burst through. A yell of "you, you....." then the fist connected with his mouth. Still bleary eyed, Hannibal staggered back, not quite falling more off balance, when the fist struck again landing almost on the same spot. The screeching voice pierced Hannibal's brain. "Untie him, you, you....."

He saw Bedelia and Zeller grabbing hold of the assailant, stopping him advancing. Frederick Chilton with eyes almost popping out of his skull screamed as he was pulled back into the hallway. "You're a dead man, Lecter."

Chapter End Notes

Robert's song is Simone by Boz Scaggs

Chapter 29

His eyes were wide as he watched Hannibal lean across and untie him. He could see the blood on the Alpha's bottom lip and a vague recollection of shouting was gnawing away at him, the boy unsure if it was real or part of a dream.

"Get dressed." Hannibal instructed. "Hurry."

Will looked into the bathroom mirror and didn't recognise the creature staring back at him, the hair was tousled and the skin blanched. He could see the bruising and his hand smoothed against the left side of his face feeling the damage. He had finished urinating when he heard a voice filled with irritation. "Hurry, Chilton is rabid."

Washing his hands and taking a quick swill of the mouthwash he walked towards the voice and took the jeans held out to him. "They belong to Zeller, mother cut off the excess material so you do not trip over."

The boy struggled with the simplest of tasks finally managing to zip up the jeans. Hannibal took the plain white shirt which he had supplied and took over the buttoning up when Will's fingers fumbled. The lack of grooming made the Omega look even more vulnerable and the ill fitting ensemble completed the ramshackle look.

"You should have told us, Will, told us the extent of your suffering. You keep too much buried. You have to share." Hannibal's hand skimmed over the boy's cheek. "You tied my hands by keeping control of your medical care but never again. Do you understand, Will."

Since receiving the early morning call, listening to the catalogue of horrors assail his ears then being denied access to the house by the guards on the gates, Frederick had tried to keep calm. Talking to Donald on the phone, instructing him if his fucking guards didn't let him in the fucking house immediately he would call Freddie fucking Lounds, he had spoken in a calm, almost polite, voice.

Frederick had refused to listen to any explanation the Lecters had tried to offer, repeatedly saying the same sentence until they gave up. "I would like to see Will. I would like to see Will. I would like to see Will." His nieces had taught him the strategy of wearing down an opponent and gaining the upper hand every time he had babysat, now he had used their tutoring to his advantage. He broke just the once, the appalling scene in the bedroom had goaded him into action but once escorted to the dining room, the calmness returned and ambling back and forth, he held up a hand to stop any conversation.

Frederick's mouth fell open after Will entered the room, the boy standing mute in front of him. Frederick looked at the hair, the marks on his face, could see the weight loss. Hannibal brushed past and stood behind the seated Donald at the far end of the room, keeping his distance from Frederick. Ignoring the voices, Frederick concentrated on the boy's eyes trying to understand whether the look in them was one of resignation or exhaustion. He took Will

by the arm and slowly turned to face the Alphas seated around their dining table, his eyes flickering from one family member to another before settling on Hannibal. He could hear the last of the sentence as Hannibal spoke, honing in on every word.

"Or we can discuss this like adults."

Frederick smiled then hissed. "He was tied to the bed."

"If I could explain.." Hannibal began.

"You had been drinking, you stank of whisky and he was tied to the bed." Frederick hissed louder.

"The boy was out of control, I had to subdue him for his own safety."

"Safety." Frederick yelled. "What did he put up too much of a fight so you had to tie him down to rape him."

"I did not rape him." Hannibal snapped back.

"He's a defenceless boy....."

Rolling back his sleeve, Hannibal's voice increased by several decibels. "Defenceless. That defenceless boy bit me."

"Good, if you tied me to the bed and tried to rape me, I'd do the same."

Hannibal spat out a laugh. "If that thought even fleetingly crossed my mind, I would beg to be put out of my misery. The boy was hallucinating."

"Oh, I see," Frederick crossed his arms slowly, head held imperiously. " the old "*hormonal Omega made me do it* " defence."

"Frederick." Donald interjected seeing the situation getting out of control." Will was drugged by Mrs Brady, the housekeeper."

"The housekeeper." Frederick screeched. "The housekeeper drugged him. What house of hell did I put the boy into. Are you all in on it?"

Still screeching Frederick turned on Alana. "Is that what you do in your Omega clinic. Drug them then let that beast loose on them. Is no one safe?"

"Frederick, please calm down." Donald pleaded.

Frederick turned his attention back to Hannibal. "Hannibal Lecter. They should have named you Animal Lecter. I bet the cattle in the field aren't safe when you're on the rampage. You, you cow fucker."

"You ignorant..." Hannibal began

"Hannibal, enough. Show some respect." Robert roared.

"Listen to your elders, sonny." Frederick sneered.

"None of this would have happened if that pretty little boy hadn't....." Hannibal's sentence was left in mid air as Will screamed with rage, lunging forward. Frederick saw Will grab the vase from the side table and with a twist and perfect rotation of the arm throw the object at Hannibal. Frederick felt time slow down as the vase headed to it's destination. As Hannibal's lifted his arm to protect his head, the missile hit the olecranon and changed trajectory into a downward slant skimming the shoulder of the American President. The breakfast plates broke as the vase hit them before bouncing off the table and onto the floor. The room was strangely quiet then the silence was shattered.

"Don't you call me that, don't you every call me that." Will screamed as he advanced towards Hannibal. **"I was locked up by a madman who called me that. Oh, oh and my past, yes. They killed my mother like she was a pig. Is that enough sharing?"**

The sounds coming from the Omega were somewhere between gasps and sobs. Hannibal couldn't move, rocked off his foundations by the actions and the words. Chilton spun into action, reaching for the boy and keeping his back to the table, sidled them towards the exit.

"We'll go home, Will, I'll take you home." Frederick's voice, soft and affectionate, changed when he spat out the words at Hannibal. "Don't think you're keeping the land. That agreement is dead."

"Please, Frederick, don't. I was rude to the Countess, please let them keep it, please." The Omega pleaded.

"Of course, Will, of course, we'll discuss it once you're home."

As Hannibal watched them leave, the turmoil spilling from the boy was palatable and the anger simmering inside the Alpha due to the assault by Chilton boiled over.

"Wait." Hannibal strode towards them, satisfaction emerging when fear streaked across the Beta's face. The Omega twisted, back to Frederick, dark grey eyes staring at Hannibal through the curls. The growl was low but clearly audible and Hannibal paused then began to smile. As the corners of his mouth turned up at the sound and Hannibal looked deeper into the eyes, the mirth disappeared. With the boy's stance as if ready to leap into attack, Hannibal could see something dangerous standing directly in front of him, not only dangerous, but untamed.

Hannibal lowered his voice. "Did you intend to break my arm with the vase, Will?"

Another growl. "I was aiming for your head."

Hannibal lifted his arms hip high, extending them towards the Omega, palms facing upwards. The boy's eyes flickered from the Alpha's face to hands then back again, giving a subtle nod accepting the Alpha's gesture of rapprochement.

"I made you a promise, Will. I said I would cook for you. If you leave now before I keep my promise you will turn me into a liar. Do you want to turn me into a liar, Will?"

There was indecision before Will gave a quick shake of the head.

"Then let me prepare breakfast for you before you leave." Hannibal moved slower and Will allowed his arm to be taken and be guided out of the room.

When the door shut behind them, Frederick gasped. "What the hell just happened?"

"My son is making amends. Did that boy growl at Hannibal?" asked Robert.

"Twice." Bedelia smiled as she began to pick up the broken china on the table.

"Tea or coffee, Dr Chilton?" Robert asked.

As the kitchen door closed behind him, Will leant forward hands on knees and breathed deeply. Hannibal walked past him and prepared the breakfast sensing the boy needed space. By the time he had made the coffee and placed the cup on the island, Will had negotiated the stool.

"You look as if you have been in a bar fight."

Will smiled at the remark and studied the Alpha, his clothes rumpled and creased and the usually tidy hair was unkempt, falling over his forehead. Will could smell Hannibal on him, the heady aroma of cedar. "Did you sleep with me last night? I can smell your scent on me."

"I am sorry if I overstepped boundaries but it was necessary to keep you subdued."

"No, I'm not complaining, I like the smell. Makes me feel safe." Will drank his coffee watching Hannibal cook the eggs, remembering the first time he had sat in the kitchen.

"How are you feeling?" Hannibal glanced over his shoulder at the boy.

"Antsy. Feel like I should be running around and ...." Will exhaled slowly "..... still feel angry."

"Residue from the blockers. You seemed lost in the dining room."

"Not anymore. It, it was the yelling and hostility between you and Frederick. It confused me. I couldn't choose and those words you said, everything was crashing down on me." Will took another sip from the cup. "I'm, I'm sorry, what you said about not telling you how sick I was, I should've."

"Yet you chose not to."

Will looked down at his cup. "I've always dreamed since I can remember and when I was taken, I found it easy to escape the reality. I'd go into my head, into my dreams and imagine I

was somewhere else. Someone else. Got so deep sometimes I didn't know what was real. Greenaway called it dissociation, said I was unstable. When I started seeing things, thought he might be right about me and just hoped it might go away."

"You were afraid we may believe you were mentally ill."

Will nodded. "Yeah, get put in an asylum with doctors poking around inside my head."

It was Hannibal's turn to sigh deeply. "We need to talk about your past, your triggers. No more quid pro quo, Will. Your reluctance to talk had dire consequences and hampered discovering the truth."

Will felt the resentment rising. "So it's all my fault."

"On the contrary, I take responsibility for much of the blame by neglecting you, a situation which I intend to rectify. Dr Chilton wishes to remove you from here which my family and I oppose. I do not want you to leave, Will."

"I don't want me to leave either."

"Then we shall make adjustments. First, if you feel well enough we can drive over to the sanctuary and bring back your horse. We can draw up a timetable so we spend more leisure time together, go places."

"I'd, I'd like that."

"Good, then after you have eaten and showered we can make the arrangements. First I shall talk to Dr Chilton. If that is acceptable." Hannibal placed the eggs and toast in front of Will.

"Hannibal, you know that I'm always going to protect Frederick, don't you?"

"I admire loyalty, Will and not only will I promise never to pose a threat to him but I will treat him with respect. God forbid, Chilton and I may even become friends."

For the first time in many days, Will laughed out loud.

"They are slippery, Frederick, they drafted the rules of the game." Abel had told him. "The Lecters will use their charm to persuade you to their way of thinking."

Frederick could see the wheels of the charm offensive turning, the Lecters were sincere but their sincerity had been determined by the elephant in the room named NOGA. The rules may have been written by the Lecters, but Frederick was about to change the game they were playing. Inwardly, he had acknowledged the rug had been pulled from under his feet, his intention to remove Will effectively sabotaged. Will had defended him not only from Hannibal but in front of the Alpha's family. Equally when the time had come, Will had meekly followed his Alpha out of the room when propositioned. Frederick mused whether Will had bothered to read the book on protocol or was just determined to re-write it. When pairings faltered, it was the duty of the families to decide the fate of the Omega but Frederick

had treated enough damaged Omegas over the years to know how emotionally devastating it was when families entered into a battle over ownership. He could see the danger for Will if he and the Lecters went to war over the boy.

"Please call me Robert." Robert had requested and when Mrs Lecter became Bedelia, Frederick also dropped the formality. Chilton could see the family unit lowering it's drawbridge and attempting to lure him across.

"You were defending your son, the same way I would mine." Robert had declared when Frederick apologised for his outburst. Frederick admired the psychology, aligning his paternal feelings for Will with Robert's feelings for his own son.

Frederick tensed at Hannibal's return, especially when the Alpha took the seat next to him. Ready to declare his demands, he found the younger man delivering a pre-emptive strike by explaining his additional motives for collecting the horse.

"It would give Abel Gideon the chance to examine Will. He has great confidence in Dr Gideon's expertise and it would help allay our concerns. If you wish, I will leave Will with you, so you can talk in private."

Frederick gave a faux smile, moved his chess piece and forced a checkmate. "If Will stays with you, I will require daily contact with him and a weekly visit to the sanctuary. Of course, if there is a problem regarding these arrangements, we could always request NOGA to arbitrate."

"This is cosy." Robert remarked randomly. "Reminds me of that old saying *" if you marry an Omega, you marry their family, with the first you find love, with the second harmony."*

Hannibal looked at Frederick and smiled through gritted teeth at his de facto father-in-law, agreeing to all Frederick's terms.

Will had woken to yesterday's memories, soaking in Hannibal's bathtub, the aloe tincture being added to the warm water, the soothing salve being smeared on his back by Hannibal. Hannibal reassuring him should he feel vulnerable during the night to call upon the Alpha, leaving the connecting door ajar to reinforce the offer. The Alpha's attitude had shifted so many points on his emotional compass, Will had trouble acclimatising. His inner voice had painted the Alpha guilt coloured which had explained Hannibal's change in attitude but Will felt no more comfortable with a guilty Alpha than an indifferent one.

Will found Bedelia in the kitchen, the house seemed quiet and he became aware of a noticeable absence of staff.

"Where is everybody?"

She didn't look up from the sink. "Robert and Hannibal have gone to Baltimore to pick up more supplies. Zeller and Alana are working. Two of the staff are on leave until further notice, the other relocated somewhere secure."

As he moved closer he could see she was busy cleaning a pot, scrubbing hard against the gleaming side As he glanced around he saw the boxes filled with groceries in one corner.

"I've decided to replace everything. I am not comfortable using items that were touched by that woman. Hence I am cleaning everything in this kitchen." She looked up at him and he could see she was on the verge of tears. "She could have killed you."

Hannibal placed the shopping bags by the side of the couch and held one open so Will could inspect the contents. "Zeller suggested the enzymes from the detergent could remain active on your clothing. I hope you do not object but I decided to replace them."

Will took out the shirt, the fabric softer than his own and the blue, a deeper warmer colour than he would normally pick.

"You have a selection of shirts, jeans and underwear. The establishments I frequent tend to lean to a more traditional style so these were purchased from stores which cater for a younger taste. If they are not suitable they can be returned."

Will opened another bag. "No, no these look great."

Hannibal handed a smaller bag to Will. "I hope this is satisfactory, these are registered in my name therefore cannot be traced back to Will Graham but they are for your use alone."

Will took out the iPhone. "I don't know what to say."

"I hope it meets your requirements." Hannibal lifted the largest bag, taking out the laptop he placed it on the table directly in front of the Omega.

Will stumbled over the words. "You don't have to buy me gifts over what happened, Hannibal, you don't have to feel guilty."

"Is that why I bought you these things, Will, because of guilt? Ah yes, because you say it is, then that must be the reason."

Will felt the temperature in the room drop several degrees. "I've said something wrong. I, I didn't mean to."

Hannibal tilted his head slightly to one side. "You put an emotion in me that did not exist. I did not buy the gifts out of guilt, I brought them for your enjoyment. I prefer to see you smiling."

Will could feel the goose bumps on his arms as a smile spread across his face. "Well, you've got what you wanted."

Hannibal sat down and watched the boy take the items from their boxes, seeing him shake his head a little as if in disbelief. As Will threw him another smile, Hannibal found himself taking pleasure in the Omega's delight.

With the drugs out of his system, Will yearned to get back to normality. Having decided the weather was too good to stay inside, Hannibal suggested they ride to the lake. He had been impressed by the boy's riding skills and the Omega's need for quiet reflection while enjoying the vista had matched Hannibal's own preference perfectly. In the solitude of his mind he was aware the boy was growing on him. He had began to take note of the way the boy sat, pulling his legs underneath him, how the boy brushed his hair away from his face then ducked his head if he knew Hannibal was looking at him. The averting of the eyes and the bowing of the head were the typical signs of Omegan submissiveness but his mind always drew him back to the image of the other Omega. The one who had stood before the Beta and protected him. The one who had growled at his Alpha and stared back with defiance.

"I'm gonna miss this" Will remarked as he was perched on the stool, his eyes following every movement as Hannibal prepared the evening meal.

"And I have enjoyed the company." Hannibal replied. "And the opportunity for you to improve your culinary skills."

"Yeah, I'm sure am faster chopping onions."

"I have been impressed how eager and quickly you learn. When the subject matter interests you. This could only be a temporary solution until a new cook was found. You will find Mrs Lake is more than capable, more traditional home cooking than French cuisine."

There was a short silence as Hannibal weighed the flour, Will had found these moments had lost their awkwardness, being content to observe the Alpha moving effortlessly around the kitchen. He could hear the thunder in the distance and feel a rush of cool air through the window.

"You are not worried by the prospect of another storm, are you?"

"It's not the storms that bother me." Will let the silence fall waiting for the Alpha to ask, but when he didn't Will felt compelled to explain.

"You've not asked me why I run away from the house that night."

"You mentioned the noise from the pump. It can be disconcerting even to those of us who have grown up with it."

"When Hobbs was away hunting his daughter was left in control. Abigail was like a spiteful child, liked to torment me. She would tie my hands behind my back then blindfold me. They would creep up on me making sounds, screaming or shouting but after a while I kinda got used to it. Then she discovered when they hit metal on metal, I got scared, real scared. Found the noise...." Will searched for the words. "eerie. Not human. Even wet my pants a few times. The noise that night brought it all back."

Before Hannibal could speak, he heard Will slip back into a southern drawl *"That was then, this is now."* which he understood as a subtle indication the door had been closed and the matter was no longer open for discussion.

"You are not worrying about this meeting." Hannibal called out.

"Nope, they just want to make sure I'm okay." Will called back from his bedroom. "Just not sure what to wear."

Hannibal could hear the sound of clothes hangers being moved along. "My mother mentioned she would look for a jacket for you."

Will's head appeared in the doorway. "You've got to stop her, Hannibal, I'm running out of closet space."

"She likes spoiling you." Hannibal looked again at the invitation, still surprised at the choice of venue for lunch. He hadn't anticipated the meeting with officials from NOGA taking place in one of Baltimore's finest restaurants with the strictest observance of protocol and neither had he expected Will's response.

Will sauntered into Hannibal's bedroom. "You're still wondering why that restaurant. You're over thinking this, Hannibal, it isn't a trap."

"I find it odd they would choose a location which put you at a disadvantage considering their total commitment to advancing Omegan rights."

Will laughed. "They like to take me out of my box once in a while and give me a whirl. Their last visit was at Wolf Trap. I inherited a house and some land in the area from my dad's friend after I moved north. I went there with Frederick and half the security guards from the sanctuary to fish and the Nogans just turned up. It's what they do."

"I am glad you are so confident."

"Don't worry, Alpha, I'll hold your hand." Will said as he started back to his bedroom.

"Will." The Omega turned back to look at Hannibal. "I have said and done things that have been unkind."

"You had issues with my dynamic in the past. Just remember I'm not responsible for the actions of others. Don't hurt me because of them. Okay?"

For a moment Will saw Hannibal's expression change, a look of regret visible in his eyes. "I am sorry if my actions hurt you."

Will took a deep slow breath. "The difference between you and me is that I care about you and wouldn't hurt you on purpose."

He continued to return to his room when he heard movement behind him. Hannibal caught up with him in a couple of strides and grabbed his arm and held him into a stop. Will felt hands on his shoulders and allowed himself be turned until he faced the Alpha.

"And I will never purposely hurt you again. I give you my word."

There was in the sentence the acknowledgment of deliberate cruelty and Will shuddered as a strange excitement rose to the surface and coursed through him. Hannibal's gaze drifted from Will's eyes to his lips and he moved into the kiss. Will felt the warm moist lips on his and froze, but the Alpha gently brushed against his mouth until Will parted his lips. He felt Hannibal's hand on the small of his back, pulling him even closer and Will instinctively latched onto the Alpha's shoulder and neck. Hannibal slowly pulled back licking his lips, his brown eyes softer.

"I hope that was a sufficient apology."

Will eased back putting space between them. "Was that for my benefit or for yours?"

"Both. A thank you for not wishing to hurt me. You would be justified to seek revenge on account of my behaviour over the last few weeks."

Will gave out a nonchalant. "Oh."

"And because I wanted to taste you."

Will felt the heat in his cheeks and knew the blush was beginning. "And did, did you like it, the taste?"

"I am not sure." Hannibal moved closer and held Will tighter, the kiss stronger than the first, more passion behind it. As the tip of the Alpha's tongue swept across his lips, Will shivered from the sensation, wanting to bare his neck to the lips. When Hannibal pulled away the second time, Will's breathing was faster.

"Well?" Will managed to fix his eyes on the Alpha's face.

The reply came with a smile and Will wished he had a camera to capture it. "I would like to change the terms and conditions of our agreement. I believe it would be in the best interest of both parties if the first year and the second were combined. You will further your education and we would also begin our courtship."

"What's changed?" Will ventured.

"I have changed. You changed me. The day you stood in front of Chilton, protecting him, I felt differently about you. We have been through so much in the last few weeks, my perception of you has altered. I would like to get to know you on a more intimate level."

"What, what do you mean by intimate."

"The housekeeper could not accept you were part of this family . It is possible our current arrangement will give others the same idea. Therefore I believe it would be advisable, in

order to ensure your safety, to show everyone you are truly my Omega and are under my protection. I would not be comfortable lying about our situation so we must bring the timetable forward a few months."

"All this to ensure my safety."

"And because I enjoy tasting you."

Chapter 30

QUANTICO - transcript of voice recording - six weeks after rescue.

WILL The violence was real, the love wasn't

GREENAWAY You don't believe people are capable of love.

WILL We're talking about Hobbs, right? They would be affectionate, then they would take off their masks, then they weren't.

GREENAWAY You were comfortable when they were violent.

WILL I knew where I was when they didn't wear masks.

GREENAWAY Do you believe people always wear masks, Will?

WILL Everyone wears a mask sometimes, Dr Greenaway, even you.

GREENAWAY And if people around you always wore masks, how would that make you feel?

WILL *(laughter)* They can wear their masks around me, Dr Greenaway, but I can see through them now.

QUANTICO - transcript of voice recording - twelve weeks after rescue.

CRAWFORD Witnesses place you at the scene when McGreevy was killed.

WILL Garrett insisted I was there.

CRAWFORD Did you play a part in the murder of McGreevy?

WILL I told you, Jack, Garrett insisted I was there.

CRAWFORD What did you do when you were there, Will? What would you call it, observing or participating?

WILL I would call it .....surviving.

"Will has named me." Bedelia told Hannibal as they cleared the dishes. "He spoke to me yesterday."

"You have accepted."

"He sees me as a Countess. He said a Countess has the kindest heart, is graceful and beautiful and always helps those in need, regardless of their station in life. It would be difficult not to accept such a compliment."

"Those sentiments are commendable and deserved." Hannibal kissed his mother on the top of her head.

"He is a wonderful boy, Hannibal. I worry."

Hannibal shifted his position and put his arm around her. "Hey, he is safe, mother. The Bradys of this world will be kept from him."

"Are you growing fonder of Will?"

"Difficult not to."

Will sat crossed legged on the floor, cell phone on the couch and laptop placed on the nearby table.

"I'm doing the email now, Frederick."

"Send it to my personal account, Will."

"Yeah, yeah, I know Frederick. Frederick, I'm using the name Will Lecter."

"Lecter? What's wrong with Graham. Have they made you change your name? Why is there an echo?"

"No, no, Frederick, I'm using Lecter online. Everything else is still Graham. You're echoing cause I got you on speaker"

"Will Lecter sounds odd."

"Yeah, well that's what I'm going to use."

"No, no, it has the ring of a tragic play. Mourning becomes Will Lecter. Use William. William Lecter has class."

"Okay, okay, Frederick, I'll use William." Will rolled his eyes as Hannibal walked into the room "Gotta go, Frederick."

"I suppose the Beast of Baltimore is summoning you."

"Gotta go." Will grabbed the cell, ended the call and returned to the email, double then treble checking it to avoid looking as Hannibal moved nearer.

"I assume I am the Beast?"

Will half smiled and stayed silent.

Hannibal handed Will the menu. "The Buchanan follows protocol to the minutest detail. I will be ordering your meal for you and as it would be considered unseemly if we conferred on your choices, I suggest you make them in advance. You have studied the list I gave you regarding protocol."

"Yeah, basically, I can be seen but not heard."

"It is important you follow the rules, they have a reputation for escorting people from the premises who do not."

"I'll be fine, Hannibal, I'm not gonna kick up a fuss."

"Will, under normal circumstances, The Buchanan is not a place I would frequent."

"I'll be fine, Hannibal, just dandy."

Hannibal looked down at the Omega at his feet. The boy had glanced up at him through the dark curls before breaking off eye contact and feigning interest in the email. Hannibal wondered how much pressure the Omega could withstand before he would buckle. The boy had a resistance to blind obedience which Hannibal had found only in older Omegas who were long past their heats. He had never seen such nonconformity in an Omega quite so young, appreciating humour even it if was at his Alpha's expense. Ambling over when he and Will had been collecting the horse from the Sanctuary, Gideon had fired his verbal arrows.

"If you don't mind a piece of advice, Mr Lecter, next time you need to fill a vacancy in your household, you should refrain from advertising it in the Psychopath Weekly. You may get a better standard of applicant. One less likely to poison family members."

Will had turned away but even with his back to Hannibal, the Alpha could imagine the broad smile. It was a smile which Hannibal was finding addictive. The boy who for so long had been imprisoned, either by a gang of killers or the self imposed confinement at the Sanctuary, was beginning to evolve.

Hannibal found he was talking to himself as the Omega had stopped in front of another store. Hurrying back, he grabbed Will's hand and pulled him along. "You have been to Baltimore before Will?"

"Yeah, Frederick always took me with a security detail." Will laughed. "Straight to our destination and straight back. Never been able to stop and look."

"You can look with my mother after this meeting."

The crowds began to thin as they reached the Alpha dominant quadrant, the steps to the restaurant visible. Steering the boy to the entrance, he checked the Omega's appearance. The light blue cotton dress shirt and dark blue blazer enhanced the colour of his eyes, confirming the decision to allow Bedelia to select the boy's outfit had been correct. With two buttons undone, the necklace caught the light and as they entered the foyer, Will walked three paces behind, keeping his head slightly bowed. A quick glance at the surroundings re-affirmed Hannibal's belief The Buchanan was still trapped in the past. The dark wood window frames and doors set the tone of the restaurant, everything stage managed to enhance the decidedly masculine feel. As they were led through the main dining area by the maître d', Hannibal could see they were being observed and heard the occasional murmur as they passed by. The second smaller section which was reserved for those considered of highest importance was emptier and as they approached the table, the two men stood up to greet Hannibal.

As they took their seats, it was apparent that Will was to be ignored as Mr Tuesday, the senior representative and Mr March, the trainee spoke directly to Hannibal. With the food order taken, displeasure began to swirl within Hannibal. The obvious interest Will was stirring in the other Alphas seated nearby, with their furtive glances at the boy by his side, rankled.

"Some would consider The Buchanan to be the natural habitat for the Alpha male." Mr Tuesday remarked.

"Some would consider The Buchanan filled with toxic air inhibiting growth." Hannibal replied.

"You consider yourself to be a liberal Alpha."

"I consider myself to be a man who does not need to subjugate others." Hannibal screened Tuesday's face as the man considered his response.

"And yet here you are breathing in the toxic air."

"It is a fact, in business, we occasionally have to twist ourselves into all sorts of uncomfortable positions in order to conform."

"And if I were to ask you and your Omega to attend all future meetings at The Buchanan?"

"If your invitation was solely for my attendance that I will gladly accept but if you were to ever ask me to subject Will to this treatment again, my response will not be civil."

Tuesday gave Hannibal an easy smile. "My first post as a trainee was with the Grahams. When I arrived at their home I expected the whole family to greet me but unfortunately the youngest member, hearing the man from NOGA was arriving, climbed the nearest tree. Apparently young Will believed NOGA to be a distant planet and I was the first wave of their invasion of earth. I told Andrew Graham that I would appreciate it if he would retrieve his son and bring him to the table. Andrew replied that if I cared to shimmy up the tree after Will then he would not object but he was confident once Isabella's strawberry cheesecake was placed on the table, Will would soon join us. I was inclined to consider Omegas as tragic figures, children unable to make wise decisions. I soon realised I was posted with the Grahams in order to be educated by them. Andrew was a wonderful man and became a good friend. He was also an excellent judge of character as is Will. Protocol insists I seek your permission to allow Will to speak, I believe you would find that approach insulting."

"Will can always speak freely, he does not need my permission or permission from anyone else."

"Good, NOGA would have it no other way. Now Will, have you thought any more about your career prospects or are you still going to be a county sheriff?"

Bedelia waited for them outside the tailor's shop, Will eyeing the frontage as if he was heading for his doom.

"You will like him, Will, he is very professional and will not engage in small talk." She said smiling as she led the way into the store.

"Five foot nine and a half." Were the tailor's opening words to Will.

"Five feet ten and three quarters." The Omega replied.

"I do not measure in wishful thinking, however you are young, maybe you will experience a growth spurt."

The measuring was impersonal, with Bedelia holding up samples of material under his chin, Will opted out of expressing a choice leaving the decisions to the others. As established customers Will could see the Lecters were treated preferentially, by the assurance from the tailor that the suit would be ready within three weeks in time for the Gathering. Any notion Will had entertained to avoid the family reunion had disappeared when he saw the relief on Bedelia's face. Will wandered to the far end of the shop looking at the neatly stacked jeans. The tailor took one pair then tilting his head from one side to the other, took a shirt from another stack, leading Will towards the changing area without a word. The jeans fitted like a second skin, the shirt silky smooth and as he looked at his reflection in the mirror, he saw someone different looking back. As he left the cubicle, seeking a second opinion, he

caught Hannibal staring at him. The Alpha's gaze travelled the full length of the Omega's body, his face wearing a smile of appreciation.

"So the meeting went well." Frederick stated.

"Yeah, Tuesday and Hannibal was giving each other icy stares. Once they thawed out they got along. Got measured for a suit, well actually three. Bedelia insisted, her treat. Used my credit card for the first time." Will stood at the window taking in the familiar view of the Sanctuary's lawns.

"So why the long face?"

"They recovered some of the goods stolen from the house. They're sending them to me. Mr Tuesday said I should read the inventory before opening the package, to be prepared. Just brought everything back."

"Is that why you wanted to see me today?"

Will smiled. "Needed to see you. You're the only one I can share this with, Frederick. I asked Tuesday if they've got any leads as to why Hobbs targeted us. He said they hit a roadblock."

"Will, you have to let this go, you may never get an answer."

"We lived modestly, Frederick, you know that. There was nothing out of the ordinary to us. So how did Hobbs find us?"

"You have gone through all possibilities, Will. Maybe someday someone will come forward. It happens."

"Yeah, it just happens. Guess the only person who can give me an answer is Garrett."

"I wish you wouldn't call him that." Frederick snapped. "Will, you can't be thinking of contacting him."

"I'm not stupid, Frederick." Will resumed his seat, looking across the desk at the Beta. "I see these patterns when it's strangers, so why the hell can't I figure this one out."

"You are too emotionally involved, it infringes your ability. Will, I want you to promise me for the time being you will not pursue this, don't turn it into a quest." Frederick watched as the Omega mouthed *"I promise"* unconvinced by the words. Frederick glanced at his watch then began to stand. "It's about time I took you home, otherwise the Beast may come looking for you."

The gates opened as they turned the corner and as a car drove through from the opposition direction, Will glanced at the driver.

"That's Jack Crawford." Will exclaimed as Frederick slowed into a stop until the guard who had approached their car waved them through with a "It's Dr Chilton". With his name now on the approved list, Frederick positively glowed.

Will listened intently as Donald detailed the findings of the investigation into the former housekeeper.

"Will, the conclusions are, in a way, you were collateral damage. It would appear Brady obsessed about Bedelia and Alana and due to her zealot tendencies, any Omega marrying into the Lecter house would not have met with her approval."

"That's comforting." Will replied sarcastically.

"Any tension in the household she blamed entirely on you. The pig's head and the artificial scent, Crawford tracked it back to her."

"Is this the FBI's new policy, Donald? You find the perpetrator, provide evidence of their guilt, then the FBI investigates." Frederick sniped.

"Brady has relatives on the west coast. Arrangements are being made to transfer her to a secure facility near them. Hopefully she will respond to treatment. It's going to be a long haul."

"Personally, I doubt someone with a zealot background is going to change. Since rights for Omegas were extended, we have seen a rise in fanaticism." Frederick stated.

"Well, Frederick, those haters better learn to suck it up because I intend to increase Omegan rights expotentially during my Presidency."

Will was used to reading the appraisals which were sent after a NOGA assessment but this was the most detailed to date. The recommendations for careers covered four pages and the options began to swim before his eyes, but he was always drawn back to the top of the first page and the words **LAW ENFORCEMENT.** No more fantasies, this was real, all laid out in black and white. The idea of going away to study had been well presented, an Omega married to an Alpha would be less likely to be subjected to harassment and he could hire a travel buddy to accompany him to keep predators at bay.

"There is a lot to digest." Hannibal remarked looking up from his book.

"Yeah, too much. I'm getting lost in all their suggestions."

"Does the idea of going away to complete your education appeal to you?"

"Does it appeal to you?"

"The online education programme is excellent and now we have begun our courtship, as your Alpha, I would prefer you by my side."

Will had always been conscious that due to their biology, the sense of belonging overwhelmed Omegas and when honeyed requests were made by their Alpha, denying them was emotionally impossible. With an indifferent Hannibal, Will would have fought the notion of complying. The kiss had changed everything, as had the conversation afterwards with hints and promises of things to come. The words "your Alpha" had set his senses tingling but the Omega still took his time before answering.

"Okay." He finally said. "Online it is."

Bedelia's stylist had originally intended to just "trim his locks" but once started, the woman had made it her mission to shape Will into her masterpiece. With Bedelia hovering in the background and Alana waiting her turn, Will was bemused as they slowly absorbed him into their private circle, chatting freely in front of him.

"Is he okay with Grandma Kade." Will asked as the conversation embraced Robert.

"He understood she contacted Frederick out of concern for you. Was even willing to overlook she had stolen his phone to make the call."

"Purloined his phone." Will corrected, using the term Robert had used.

"Purloined his phone. But calling everyone on his contact list informing them Robert was under investigation by the FBI. That still smarts." Bedelia laughed as she shook her head, secretly admiring her Omega mother. "Poor Robert, fielding calls from his friends asking whether a Special Agent had paid him a visit. Of course, he couldn't deny it as it was the truth but not for the reasons she inferred."

"Yeah, how to subvert your enemy. Hide a lie within the truth." Said Will remembering how well he had perfected the tactic with Hobbs.

Alana's side sweep hairstyle was eye catching, transforming her features from Alphan authority to Omegan vulnerability with Madame Sylvie primping it over and over until they were both content. Satisfied they were all looking their best, Bedelia led the way down the stairs to the sitting room. The Alpha males in their tuxedos added the finishing touches of sophistication to the evening and with each step Will could feel he was entering into another realm. Accustomed to Hannibal wearing suits, the formal outfit brought out the elegance in his Alpha and Will's heart beat a little faster, the reality of being publicly escorted by this man

finally hitting him. As they joined the others, Robert prepared the pre party cocktails, a tradition established by the DuMauriers and when Will noticed the way Hannibal looked at him, he felt shy again around his Alpha.

"You look perfect, Will, enchanting." Hannibal said taking a box from the side table and presenting it to the Omega. "This is to mark our new beginning."

Opening the box, Will was dazzled by the contents. The black sapphires mounted in the white gold line necklace screamed money and the word magnificent sprang into Will's head.

"If I may." Hannibal removed the wedding necklace around Will's neck, replacing it with his gift and with murmurs of approval around him, Will was overwhelmed by his deep attachment to this family.

The journey in the chauffeur driven limousine followed by the red carpet laid out in front of the spotlight illuminated Sutcliffe House intensified the dream like quality. Hannibal felt the Omega periodically lean into him and he grasped Will's hand, giving the occasional squeeze, to show his support.

"Get used to it, Will." Hannibal murmured. "This is small compared to a White House extravaganza."

The entrance which a few weeks before had been conservative was now festooned with palms, exotic lilies and vines trailing around the stair rail. Through the huge dining room, which was a festival of colour and splendour, the group continued outside onto the long terrace then down a short flight of steps to where Kade was waiting with a contingent of similar featured women.

"Good grief." Robert gasped. "The Blooms."

With the greetings about to take place, Kade weaved her way to Will, grasped both of his hands and announced. "*I want you to meet the girls*." Unceremoniously propelled into the midst of the elderly ladies, Will was besieged by an outpouring of Omegan affection typically reserved for family members.

Will felt he had climbed on board a merry-go-round. Posed for official photographs, Bedelia made Will a promise. "Don't worry, Will, none featuring you will find their way to the press or online." Then positioned in line with the family welcoming guests, Will hissed at Hannibal.

"You didn't tell me about this part either"

"Protocol, Will." The Alpha replied. "The children and grandchildren of Aaron Sutcliffe are technically the hosts for this evening and would be expected to greet the guests. As my mate it would be considered impolite if you were not by my side."

With the band playing something vaguely Viennesse, Donald and Bedelia stepped onto the dance floor. Despite his long lanky look, Donald was a surprisingly graceful dancer and Bedelia seemed almost to glide under her brother's direction. After the first circuit, others soon followed their lead, Kade taking Hannibal's arm to join the waltz.

"Kade manages a slow dance despite her years." Robert remarked to Will. "I believe in her younger days, she was quite sought after at these types of functions due to her versatility."

The second dance Kade had reserved for Will and as the pair moved to the slow rhythm, he could imagine her in her youth dancing the night away.

"I had many suitors when I was a young girl, more than my sisters or cousins." She said speaking with pride and as the Bloom tables came into view, Will could see the elderly ladies eyeing his every move, waiting for him to become available.

With the buffet supper underway, and as the guests began to settle after loading their plates, the bi fold doors leading out to the terrace were pushed back to reveal the choir of young Omegas. Will's smile froze as Tobias Budge came into view and, after a low bow to the guests, began to conduct. Listening to the medley of songs he remembered as a small child filling the room, Will became lost in the music. When the performance was over, Will contributed to the loud applause, clapping until his palms were stinging.

"Those songs had great meaning for you, brought back memories." Hannibal said having observed his Omega throughout the performance.

"Yeah." Will replied swallowing down the emotion. "Brought back home."

As the tiredness crept up on him, Will made his way onto the terrace and watched as the number of cars parked on the far side began to dwindle as guests departed. He didn't take much notice of the footfall behind him until it came to a halt and the scent drifted his way.

"You've kept yourself pure." Budge made it sound like a victory.

"I, er, gotta go." Will turned and with head down made to move.

Budge's reaction was cobra quick and his hand gripped Will's bicep, the vice like hold keeping Will stationery. "I expect submission from an Omega not disrespect."

"I want to go back inside." Will tried not to spit out the next word. "Please."

"You looked quite beautiful tonight and behaved as someone, who one day will be seen by my side, should."

"I'm married." The pain increased in Will's arm as the hand squeezed tighter.

"When the moment comes, you will be by my side. I expect you to keep yourself tidy and not be covered by that low grade's stench. If I smell him on you, you will disappear in a blink."

"You're talking about Hannibal?" The hand squeezed again and Will cried out in pain. "You're hurting me."

"Mention his name again and his mother and sister might not look quite as pretty in death."

Will slowly looked at the Alpha, his eyes blazing with anger. "You touch them and he'll kill you."

"It is the prospect of death that drives me to greatness. That low grade is already numbered among the dead."

"Why me, why involve me?"

"I am only allowing you to touch greatness as your royal heritage will enhance our sons pedigree."

"You're fucking crazy." Will spat out before the pain nearly brought him to his knees.

"Defiant again, Omega. When I mount you and fill you with my seed hour after hour, you will thank me and beg me not to stop."

Bedelia prided herself on knowing exactly where her family were. She could see Robert and Zeller on the far side of the room trying in vain to extract themselves from the Blooms, Alana and Donald on the dance floor and the generous laughter generating from nearby, pinpointed Hannibal standing with a group of Sutcliffe cousins. Searching for her Omega son-in-law proved difficult and worrying as Will had stayed close to immediate family for most of the evening. Looking to the garden she saw the familiar shaped figure and reacted immediately. Walking with perfect balance and an aura of stealth, Bedelia reached Hannibal and took his glass from his hand.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, I need to borrow my son."

Allowing her to steer him from the group, Hannibal strode with purpose after his mother said. "Will. Terrace. Now."

Hannibal stopped on the terrace and inhaled, the strong odour of Omegan citric was obvious but the secondary Alpha aroma less identifiable.

"Will come to me." Hannibal spoke evenly not risking a confrontation until his Omega was safe. With no movement, Hannibal growled. "Will, come to me at once."

Hannibal watched the other Alpha adjust his position then the Omega side stepped and raced towards him. Will's arms encircled him, the body pressed hard against him.

"I am afraid your Omega was a little unwell. As it appeared he was about to faint, I steadied him for practical reasons. The breach of protocol was inadvertent." Budge said keeping his back to Hannibal.

"Will?" Hannibal sought the Omega's face but a nod of the head confirmed the explanation, leaving Hannibal with no other choice. "Very well, I accept your words."

"Thank you and au revoir, Mr Lecter."

Knowing Budge had left, Will continued to hold on, his legs still shaking and with the tip of his nose now touching his Alpha's neck he murmured. "Can we stay here for a while."

With his arms enveloping the Omega and the boy's scent noticeably calming, Hannibal replied. "As long as you desire."

Will lay on his back listening. The door between the rooms now permanently left ajar, it would be easy to judge when Hannibal had gotten into bed. Will wondered how he managed to survive the rest of the Gathering without falling apart, constantly scanning each doorway expecting Budge to burst through brandishing a gun. Confident the Alpha had settled, Will swung his legs off the bed and approximating what he considered to be a sensual walk, went into the Alpha's room. Hannibal looked up in surprise, lowering the book he was reading as Will continued his path. Sitting on the edge of the bed, Will gave a quick lick of his lips.

"Will?"

"I want to thank you for tonight." Will whispered and leaning forward began to kiss the Alpha. With no immediate response Will stepped up his efforts, kissing more fervently, until hands grasped his shoulders and pushed him gently back.

"Will?"

Will's head dropped forward. "God, I'm no good at this."

"What this are you talking about?"

Will shook his head in embarrassment. "A couple of the Blooms mentioned my purity, didn't realise I was married. Said I don't smell of you."

"So this is your attempt at seduction."

Will was unable to make eye contact. "They're not the only ones noticing it, Hannibal. A married Omega should smell of their mate."

"Are you afraid, Will, did someone bother you?"

"Yeah, I'm afraid, Hannibal, I'm afraid of becoming a target..... for gossips."

"It is common for an Alpha Omega couple to wait until the Omega's heat before consummating their marriage. Sleeping together without intimacy is a test of the Alpha's fortitude. If you sleep beside me, you will acquire my scent." Hannibal breathed in deeply. "I suggest you bring your pillow."

Will woke slowly, hair tickled his nose and the rise and fall of his upper body made his senses snap into place. Laying on top of Hannibal, his head on the man's chest, he had never blushed this early in the morning. His left hand was on the Alpha's neck and his leg was wedged between the thighs.

"You are awake."

"So are you." As he tried to move, Will was aware of Hannibal's hand. "Why is your hand inside my boxers?"

"The first time I believe was a mistake."

"The first time?"

"When I removed it, you protested by making a whining noise. You would only quieten when I replaced my hand."

Will extracted himself carefully, catching sight of the mischievous look.

"A whining noise?"

"I was afraid you would wake the family."

Grinning, Will clambered off the bed and headed for his bathroom, calling out. "Yeah, right."

With the household now permanently devoid of weekend staff, Hannibal volunteered to provide the evening meal with Zeller agreeing to assist. Will sat in the sun room, facing the sitting room and opened his laptop. As raucous laughter filtered down the hallway, he guessed the brothers were discussing the previous night's events and a feeling of contentment warmed him. Typing the words **TOBIAS BUDGE** he hesitated before acting. Accessing Budge's threats which were lodged in his memory, he initiated the search. Studying the options, he found his goal and the face of Budge filled the screen.

"Threaten my Alpha, my family. Disappear me in a blink." Will said softly to the picture on the screen. "When it comes to crazies, you ain't my first rodeo. You have no idea what I am capable of, you deluded bastard, no fucking idea."

Chapter 31

"Show her." Hannibal tried to contain his anger. "Show my mother, Will."

Will shot the Alpha a look then pulled up the sleeve. The bruising was clearly visible, the reddish blue finger marks prominent.

"Budge." Hannibal said to his mother as way of an explanation as Will looked down at the floor and kept silent.

Seated either end of the couch with Bedelia standing facing them, she observed dark anger roll across her son's face whilst Robert failed to comment appearing to read his journal.

"Hannibal?" Bedelia asked.

"I saw the marks by accident, Will seemed intent on keeping them covered. He is unable to grasp that I have a duty to protect him. He believes walking away from a situation which involves another Alpha is acceptable and advisable which we both know is not true. Budge also lied to me. By withholding the truth, Will may have given Budge the idea that he appreciated the attention."

"Will, the law is clear. An attack on you constitutes an attack on your Alpha and Hannibal is permitted to retaliate. Legally, it would be deemed self defence." Bedelia spoke softly trying to calm the situation .

"Budge was talking crazy maybe he had too much to drink. I tried to get away and he grabbed me. If he and Hannibal had gotten into a fight, the blame would have stuck to me. You know, the pathetic Omega who panics cause a drunken Alpha makes a pass."

"Never emasculate me again, Will." Hannibal's bellow tore through Will and springing up to make his escape, Bedelia blocked the Omega's path.

"Okay, want the truth, I was scared, scared you might get hurt or worse and I'd have lost you. That's why I kept quiet. Happy?" When tears rolled down his face, Will was overcome by embarrassment and he hurriedly tried to wipe them away. "I hate this, hate being Omegan."

"You cannot help your biology." Bedelia put her hands tenderly on his shoulders, but as she caught the scent, she glared at her son. "As your feelings for Hannibal become stronger then so will your need to please him."

His mother's sharp stare made Hannibal uncomfortable and as the Omega choked back a sob, Hannibal rolled his eyes and rose from his seat. "Will, I am not angry with you. Hey, Will, look at me, hey, hey, beautiful."

The boy looked up at Hannibal, biting his lower lip, his eyes flickered nervously from one Alpha to the other. Hannibal gave a wry smile, intrigued as to how the weak, defenceless side

of this creature could possibly co-exist with the fierce, defiant one. "This incident will be filed away but not forgotten, if he approaches you again, he will be dealt with. Do you understand."

With a nod from Will and with peace seemingly restored, Robert stirred.

"Do you fear loss, Will?" Robert watched the boy's mannerisms, how under scrutiny he would rub his palms together as if to create warmth.

Will shrugged . "Things got taken away from me so often, after a while it felt like a way of life. I knew the Sanctuary wasn't a permanent home but it's different here. I'm happy and don't want to leave ."

"Understandable." Robert said sympathetically. "So Budge made no direct threats?"

Will hesitated before replying, measuring his response. "Insane ramblings, nothing that would stand up in court."

"That is the second time you have made reference to his mental health. I wondered whether, as an empath, you may have picked up on signs which others overlook."

Will hesitated again before deciding on honesty. "He reminded me of Hobbs, that same grandiosity, always talking themselves up. They're natural fantasists."

"It would appear whilst raising funds across the states, Mr Budge became the must to avoid. Ironically, his presence made Franklyn the popular one. Boosted the Senator's self esteem, I believe."

"Nobody really knows what the climate is really like inside Budge." Will selected the words carefully, sensing Robert already had insight.

"Evidently not, which is why I believe the shape of events which took place after your encounter with him were probably the safest route. Still, Budge and Franklyn soon will be embarking upon their European tour, and as they will busy, I doubt if your paths will cross."

As his mother's arms folded across her chest and one eyebrow arched, Hannibal understood the message. "Before I fulfil my role as chef, I believe we may have time for our swim. Will, if you would oblige and fetch our trunks, I would be grateful."

Now relaxed, the boy agreed, giving the Alpha a playful salute before leaving the room.

"You are drawing him to you much faster than I would have anticipated. You are sleeping with him."

"We share the same bed, mother, that is all."

"The old Alphan fortitude." Robert chuckled. "I've never known an Alpha to last more than two weeks before indulging in some form of hanky panky."

Bedelia looked directly at her son, monitoring his face. "You built a brick wall between you and Omegas and yet within a very short space of time you are dismantling it."

"Will told me remarks were made about his purity, I overhead comments as well. Ensuring my scent is on him, may end the speculation, speculation which Will finds intrusive. I have also become aware that Budge is not the only Alpha whose attention Will has caught."

"And that makes you jealous."

"It makes me protective."

"Do you feel love towards him."

"When I look to the future, mother, it is a future with Will by my side. I intend to take him to places, witness events which have been denied him."

"You intend to be his first in everything."

"I intend to give Will the opportunity to enjoy the best that life has to offer."

"Hannibal, legally your father and I may have a duty of care towards Will, but I do not need legislation to force me to watch over the boy. As long as you understand."

"I applaud those sentiments and would not have it any other way." Hannibal gave a lazy smile.

Robert waited until Hannibal and Will had left for their swim before he spoke, the furrowed brow of his wife troubling him. "My darling, Hannibal sees William as an unfinished crossword puzzle. A grid of boxes which he intends to fill."

"He never answered as to whether he feels love towards Will."

"When Hannibal addressed the boy as "hey beautiful" I believe the question was already answered. William is a conundrum, a complex mosaic of emotions and we both know Hannibal adores unravelling puzzles."

Bedelia liked the informality of the weekend, the absence of staff was hardly noticed, thereby reinforcing her decision not to return to the old routine. She made the pastry as Hannibal checked the contents of the oven. Will, standing at the counter to her right, peeling and coring the apples.

"Slice them evenly." Hannibal had told the Omega but Will's efforts were more industrial standard than fine cuisine.

"Let me show you." Hannibal stood behind the Omega, his hands covering the boy's and he guided Will through the process. Bedelia could see their bodies touching and once satisfied the boy had mastered the technique, Hannibal moved away, one hand briefly resting on the slope of the Omega's neck. Bedelia saw Will turn quickly towards the Alpha raising his head

and exposing his neck, subconsciously advertising his availability to his future mate, before returning to the task at hand. Watching the Omega's display, Bedelia began to wonder who was chasing who.

Relief washed over Will when Dr Tocca introduced herself. Tall, slender, black hair twisted into a bun, her wide, welcoming smile had put the nervous Omega instantly at ease. Insisting Hannibal be present throughout the appointment, she had consented to Will's demand without protest.

"If having your Alpha present during our appointments makes you feel comfortable, then I have no objections. Your well being takes priority."

The physical examination had been perfunctory, blood pressure, height and weight until stripped down to his boxers and standing behind a screen, Dr Tocca had inspected his body for marks. Budge's calling card still conspicuous, Will could see a shadow of alarm cast over the Beta's face and viewing himself through her eyes, all that could be seen was a victim.

"Another Alpha." Will said defensively. "I went outside for some fresh air at a function and this guy grabbed me. You can check it against Hannibal's hand, it's too small to be his."

"We have to be sure, Will, domestic violence is still a major issue and one of the prime factors why so many hospital emergency rooms are filled with Omegas which is to say I cannot ignore it." The Beta replied. "I will register the mark, record your explanation and book another appointment in two months time. If you do need to talk to me privately, rest assured anything you say will be treated as confidential."

Seated next to Hannibal, Will found himself looking to the Alpha for support before answering questions, as if determined to rob himself of the right to be treated as an individual. As the war raged between his two sides as they both tried to claim ownership, Will tried to stay in control.

"I need to ensure you have received the mandatory sexual education tutoring. I can't see any record of a school's confirmation that you attended the classes?" Dr Tocca remarked as she turned the pages of Will's medical file.

"I was abducted when I was twelve, my kidnappers didn't bother much about my schooling."

"And when you lived at the Sanctuary?"

Will's mind drifted back to Frederick's lessons, who for reasons best known to himself, had insisted on a chalk board being used on those occasions.

"There is a mythology surrounding sexual matters which we will now discuss. The most common inaccuracy is the belief that Omegas only partake in sexual activity during their heats. As Omegan heats occur every three months and last on average two days, the mathematics would indicate Omegas engage in the sexual act eight times a year. Although perfectly true, based on personal experience, in a Beta Beta relationship, I can

assure you it is not the case with regard to Omegas. Omegas love to party. Now I would like to address the issue as to whether or not pregnancy could occur should an Alpha ejaculate on your leg....."

"It was okay." Will struggled to find the right words to describe the experience.

"The clinic will provide you with basic knowledge but certain emotions are beyond any Alpha or Beta's comprehension. It would be preferable for you to talk over these aspects with another Omega who is sexually experienced , friends your age range, maybe another dual."

Running through the possibilities, Will was drowning in the bleakness and he felt and sounded feeble as he spoke. "I haven't met another dual since I was a kid and I don't have any friends my age. Omegan or otherwise."

Hannibal's decision for them both to stay in Baltimore for a few days after their meeting with the doctor had been unexpected. Will had watched Bedelia's face as Hannibal mentioned it casually around the dinner table and saw her displeasure.

"I would have thought for the time being it would be better for Will if he stayed within the confines of the family."

"Family life is ideal for an Omega but Will is young and needs to be able to spread his wings a little. I will keep him safe, if that is what worries you."

"What worries me is that you are about to expose Will to people who may not be so welcoming. Especially some of those within your circle." Bedelia said coldly as she laid out her argument against Hannibal's decision.

"It is not my intention to expose Will to my circle, as you call them. it is my intention to allow ourselves time to get to know each other better."

Will's reaction to Chandler Square hadn't been the one Hannibal had anticipated. The usual comments made when guests arrived were always complimentary, impressed by the décor and size of the house but Will remained muted, just a quick shiver as they passed the door to the basement.

"You seem a little apprehensive." Hannibal remarked.

"Not fond of basements. Spent too much time locked in one." Will murmured. "The house, the colour scheme, it's very .....Alphan."

"You would prefer creams?"

Will laughed out loud. "It's your house, Hannibal, I should have expected a bold look."

"It is our house now, Will and if you desire change then I am open to suggestions."

Will gave his customary half smile. "No, it gives me insight into your character."

Hannibal gave the Omega a cursory look as he opened the door to the master bedroom. "A strange thing to say, as if you believe there is a part of me hidden."

"I thought you wanted us to get to know each other better? We all have a shaded side even Omegas, a version of ourselves we are not willing to expose except to those of a similar calling." Will shrugged. "Social fronts have a short half life, we all show our true nature in the end."

"You are very philosophical today, Will, perhaps meeting Doctor Tocca influenced you. I am curious as to why you have kept that aspect hidden."

"It's not expected of me, not someone of my age or dynamic." Will walked around the bedroom inspecting the sketches adorning the walls. "Omegas can't run for the presidency because it is generally accepted they can't stand the rigours of office. We could never make the hard decisions, never give the order to open the silos and fire the missiles. We'd be screaming and begging for help. The problem was when I begged for help no one was listening. I discovered the hard way that I had to help myself."

"Your words sound like a declaration of independence forging through layers of confinement."

Will slowly turned to face the Alpha. "When we were in Doctor Tocca's office, I was looking to you to speak for me, answer her questions. I was diminishing myself and putting you in a position which ultimately you'd despise. I was losing myself, becoming someone else, being what she wanted to see. A child."

"And what do I want to see?"

"You want an equal not a simpering Omega bowing down to you but polite society will expect the latter not the former. Not sure which I am. I switch so easily between the two. Can't let people keep seeing me as a child, need to grow up a bit."

"You are inconstant which is part of growing up. You are still very young, Will, something I sometimes forget. Forced into an adult world at a very early age. An existence which even adults would have found difficult to survive."

Will placed his case on the bed and opened it. "You've read Frederick's file."

"An account written by a third party from the safety of their office. You need to be the author of your own life story."

Will began to unpack. "One day I'll tell you the truth, the whole truth, things I've never been able to tell anyone else. Just hope you'll still like me when I've finished talking."

"Nothing you say can alter my opinion of you." Hannibal watched a sudden despondency overtake the boy, the shoulders sagged and his mouth opened then shut and the Alpha seized the opportunity. "I value honesty, Will."

"Wanna bet?" The look of defiance returned as the boy lifted his head, reminding Hannibal of the other Omega defending his surrogate father. "Ever killed anybody, Hannibal, cause I have. By proxy."

Chapter 32

The words hung in the air before Will broke the silence. "I need a drink. Something strong."

Hannibal moved forward, an arm stretched out wide, placing it around the Omega's shoulder. Will felt waves of relief flow through him and allowed himself to be swept out of the room.

Hannibal's version of a strong drink consisted of one finger of whisky drowning in a sea of cola. Will sipped it before daring to look at the Alpha, Hannibal's expression impenetrable.

"Never thought you were a whisky drinker, Will."

"My dad's drink." Will replied. "Guess it's a security blanket, reminds me of him."

"We were talking about my valuing honesty."

Will didn't divert his gaze but stared straight at the Alpha, knowing anything less could be misconstrued as deceit. Leaning forward he grasped the tumbler in both hands. "Being kidnapped was like walking into a nightmare, one I couldn't escape. We were jaunted around from place to place and I kept losing my family along the way. Finally when it was just me, Hobbs started being real kind to me." Will laughed nearly spilling the drink. "Seriously, he didn't hurt me, just talked endlessly about our future together, like we were sweethearts. My mom had told me to play along if I wanted to survive. Even gave me her collar the night before she died.....I think I told you that."

Will casually leaned back and took another sip. "Hobbs surrounded himself with an underclass, most hadn't got any schooling so he could fool them with all kinds of mashed up junk. Yeah, he could fool all of them except McGreevy. He was different, the worst. A drifter with no allegiance to anyone, cold, calculating and dangerous. He was the one who killed my mom, told Garrett she tried to escape but that was a lie. McGreevy was sleeping with Abigail and liked to have an audience so I was given a front row seat. He'd be fucking her while looking at me, thinking of me. I knew it was only a matter of time before there was no Abigail between us." Will took another swig of whisky flavoured cola. "Do you want me to go on?"

Hannibal gave a sad smile. "I truly believe you have wanted to rid yourself of this burden for a very long time."

"McGreevy knew some of the traffickers tricks, suggested to Garrett they play the long con. Sell me on the internet, get the cash and disappear. McGreevy said they'd get a million but the bids kept going higher and higher. Lots of overseas interest in Omegas especially an underage virgin dual. Abigail Hobbs handled the deal, was the only one with computer savvy but she couldn't keep her mouth still when she drank. Told me when the sale was over, she and McGreevy would personally hand me over to my new owner then vacate with the money. It was Garrett who was being conned." Will slowly finished the drink and placed the tumbler on the floor.

"Do you want to continue?" The Alpha asked.

Will nodded taking in a lungful of air. " I have a specific way of thinking, had gotten so far into Garrett's head, it was as if we were one, so I played the cards I'd been dealt with. I told him about McGreevy's plan but told him Abigail had been forced to help, that he'd assaulted her and molested me. I knew Garrett would go bat shit, cause nobody was allowed to touch daddy's baby girl or his pretty little boy. Garrett kept on at Abigail until she broke, she couldn't admit to willingly sleeping with McGreevy, so she backed my lie. I kept her secret and she kept mine."

Will bent forward and retrieved the tumbler from the floor pushing himself out of the couch murmured. "I need another drink."

Although inwardly objecting Hannibal kept quiet. Adjusting his position in his chair, he studied the Omega as he walked to the cabinet. Will picked up the decanter, removed the stopper and poured at least two fingers. The way the boy had walked, held his drink, gave Hannibal the impression of an older Will Graham, one who had lived through many tough seasons. Returning to his seat, Hannibal watched as the Omega took another sip, his bottom lip momentarily trembling, his eyes fixed on the door. The Alpha, careful not to distract the boy, listened as he continued to revisit his past.

"The moment I set everything into motion, I knew they would probably kill him. Thought they'd take him out back and put a bullet in his head, their usual method. This time was different. Garrett made me watch. They looped a thick rope around his neck and the two men at each end took hold and pulled." Will closed his eyes. "It was horrific. People don't always die easily and he didn't . All I could hear were those sounds coming from his mouth and his feet scrambling against the ground. After, I just wanted to go over to him, shake his arm and say sorry, hoping he'd wake up. I needed him to wake up cause I couldn't believe what I'd done. The joke was on me, it was the FBI who had bought me and their rescue team were set to go. Two days later I was sitting in a SUV with Beverly Katz's arm around me and with Jack Crawford telling me I was going home."

The Omega stilled, the head now ducked in the familiar fashion as Hannibal slowly exhaled before speaking. "You did what you had to do to survive. I would have done the same. Desperate situations induces desperate measures."

"You're an Alpha, it would be expected of you. I was a kid, Hannibal, an Omega, we're not supposed to arrange someone's death."

"Did you really believe McGreevy would have just handed you over to the buyer? Or did part of you sense you would die by his hands once he had finished with you. I would suggest you were prompted by the need to defend yourself, but even you could not predict the brutality you would witness as a result of your actions."

"That's what Jack said when he found out. But I didn't tell him everything. My intentions were always bad, I wanted McGreevy dead, wanted him to suffer cause he killed my mom." Will spat out the words. "I'd visualise it, could almost taste it but when it happened, it was the ugliest thing in the world."

"Revenge is bittersweet, Will. At the time we feel justified but when the malevolence abates, reality sets in." Hannibal had listened to the boy speak with composure as he told his tale, almost too composed. Controlling his emotions and tempering his words started to take it's toll and the Alpha prepared to support his Omega as he began to fall apart.

"The day my mom died the shine went out of the world. My whole life became if only. If only my dad had gotten home earlier, if only we had gone to Grahamsville that weekend. I watched my sister and mom die, saw my dad bleeding out in the hallway, watched Georgia climb into the night." His voice broke as he tried to continue. "I miss them. Wanna be with them. Can't take being alone."

Hannibal was beside the Omega before the emotional dam broke, taking the drink from the boy's hand and placing it to one side, he comforted Will as the crying started. With the Omega leaning across him, Hannibal held him tight, feeling the boy's body shake from the expulsion of pent-up sorrow and between each sob, he could hear the words *"I'm sorry"*. Whether meant for the Alpha as an apology for his breaking down or for a deceased killer, Hannibal wasn't sure, but the raw and broken sounds spilling from the Omega, ripped through him and he suspected Will had never cried like this before.

Hannibal was impressed by the boy's resilience, within the hour he had composed himself, insisting they follow Hannibal's original plan and eat out. The boy only briefly referred back to earlier with an embarrassed apology.

"You do not have to apologise, Will, you have a right to your grief." Hannibal had replied as he placed his hand tenderly against the boy's cheek.

Will showered first and stood barefoot by the open door of the closet selecting a shirt. Dressed only in black pants, the slender back and slightly toned arms were on view, meeting with the Alpha's approval as he lay on the bed taking in the boy's physique. As if knowing Hannibal's eyes were on him, Will turned his head towards the Alpha.

"Something wrong? You're staring." Will asked.

"I am just admiring the view." The Alpha responded smiling, drawing a blush from Will.

Hannibal had chosen the restaurant with care. Famous for it's cuisine and personable employees, they had been greeted warmly at the door and shown to their table. The dim lights and absence of loud chatter or music added to it's ambience. The candle lit table gave an intimate and romantic feel whilst, in contrast, the open kitchen at the far end became a hive of controlled activity as orders were placed and the chefs created their specialities.

With not too many other diners, the Omega relaxed. As Hannibal's described their future vacations, white sand beaches, sailing around the small islands, sleeping on deck gazing at the stars, Will's winning smile made frequent appearances. Acquaintances would occasionally stop by to greet Hannibal and be introduced to his Omega, but never intruded by over staying their welcome.

"You have a contagious personality." Will remarked unexpectedly. "People like you, like your attitude. It's reassuring, makes them feel good and they carry that forward to the next person they meet."

"You have gathered this information from a few handshakes and brief snatches of conversation." Hannibal's feeling of intrigue was reflected in his voice.

"You're charming and sincere. No false faces or masks. That's why they wear a genuine smile when they see you."

Will got ready for bed quickly. Hannibal could see the Omega grow visibly tired as the evening wore on, and after an emotionally draining day, he wasn't unduly surprised. As he walked into the bedroom from the adjoining bathroom wearing just his pyjama bottoms, Hannibal noticed the boy avert his eyes.

"I am afraid I will have to dispense with the top, Will, I am finding I am waking up in a sweat."

"I told you I run hot." The boy said.

"Still shy of me, Will? I noticed when we go swimming you look away until I am in the pool." Hannibal said softly.

Will glanced at the Alpha coyly through dark curls. "When I thought about finding a husband I always imagined someone who was kinda like me, my build. You're very male, very masculine."

"Not to your taste?" Hannibal sounded bemused.

"No, no, it just takes a little getting used to, that's all."

The extra large bespoke bed gave them more room to settle but as Hannibal sat on the edge of the bed, the boy rolled over to the far side with his back to the Alpha. "The other reason I have dispensed with my top is you tend to wake me in the night when you try to take it off."

The Omega immediately rolled back to face Hannibal. "No, I don't"

"I have been woken numerous times during the night to find your hand is fiddling with my buttons until they come undone."

Will started to protest but stopped, remembering whatever position he started to drift off to sleep in, he always found himself waking stretched over Hannibal, with his face resting on the man's chest. Will rolled back again and huffed. "Count yourself lucky. At least you don't wake up to a hand in your boxers caressing your ass."

"I live in hope, Will." The Alpha said cheerily.

Holly's lips widened into a grin as Hannibal walked into the club. "Look what the cat's dragged in."

"Hello, Holly, good to see you too." Hannibal smiled.

"Hadn't seen you for a while then I heard on the grapevine you got married, wasn't sure if it was true."

Hannibal made his way to the bar and perched on a stool. "The grapevine is correct."

"So which one of your blue blood Alpha bitches have you hitched your knot to." Holly huffed out.

"None. Will is an Omega." Hannibal grinned as a look of shock swept across Holly's face.

"Oh my God. I always knew you had good taste but this. Well, you can slap my ass and call me Betty. "

"And he is a dual." Hannibal watched as Holly's mouth fell open.

"Oh my God, oh my God, where is he, I have to meet him." Holly's excitement reached the far corners of the room.

"Tonight, which is why I am here. Will is with Alana, she is showing him the Omega clinic. A ruse really, as I wished to talk to you alone, to ask for a favour. Will's family are deceased and he is isolated. He needs more Omegan companionship in his life."

"Oh, Han, he shouldn't be on his own. You tell me about your Will and I'll see what I can do. You know I'll do anything for you."

Will's eyes absorbed every sight presented as they walked into the club. The interior was extensive and lavish, with a long brightly lit bar dazzling the left side and tables occupied with customers of all age groups, dynamics and dress codes vying for attention on the right. The figure approached them as they were halfway across the tiled floor and with his hand gripping Hannibal's tightly, Will felt the familiar reassuring squeeze from the Alpha. Wearing a black and gold dress with black satin pumps, a tapering blonde wig cut into a bob, the svelte Omega accepted a kiss on the cheek from Hannibal before inspecting the boy with huge saucer eyes, exclaiming in a smoky growl.

"Oh, Han, he's gorgeous. Will, you and I are about to become friends."

Escorted to a corner table, Holly sat opposite Will studying his face. Will closed his eyes to catch the scent, masked under the perfume the zest finally hit him. Will's smile beamed, mirrored by the other Omega and for several minutes they sat staring at each other. Within the first five sentences, Will was wrapped up in the warmth and joy exuding from the other dual, in another ten, he discovered Holly's life was as colourful as the Omega's lipstick.

"You're not from the north." Will said picking up on Holly's carefully crafted accent.

"No hiding from you. Charleston. Left when I was eighteen."

"On your own?" Will waited for the story to unfold, knowing a southern Omega rarely ventured far from their family.

"Daddy up and died when I was young and to survive, my mama married this Beta bastard. Back then I was Marty Hollis, a small, skinny, quiet kid but he soon kicked that out of me. He wasn't too happy having to carry someone else's baggage especially a dual so when mama popped out a few of his breed, I became surplus to requirements. He made my life hell so I paid him back but it did me no favours, the more my temper would get away from me, the more troubled I looked. Finally they got a judge to send me to one of those hospitals where a psychiatrist declared I was suffering from pre heat psychosis. They forced my mama to sign the papers then they had me spayed."

Will's distress showed, having heard the stories growing up, Holly was the first victim of the atrocities he had ever met.

"I didn't mean to upset you, sugar." As Holly patted Will's arm, a single tear rolled down the boy's face. "I made my way north working the bars, could sing some and play the guitar and wound up in Baltimore. Still good fortune sometimes springs from the bad. You see that great big silverback tending bar."

Will turned to look at the large black bearded bartender. "Well, he's Ernesto, my Alpha, and when we met it was love at first sight. When I found this place, it was a wreck but I could see it's potential. Got a loan from the DuMaurier Omega Foundation, Bedelia approved it and I set about creating my dream. Eventually we introduced the Saturday burlesque and then, oh boy, the whole thing took off. That was when Holly Martini arrived, I saw what the others did and knew I could do it just so much better. Of course, nothing we do is tacky. We even put on special performances, you know, the classics. Our Macbeth was glorious, the three witches all twirling their nipple tassels, Hannibal's daddy loved it."

Will was stunned into silence but once his mind was swimming with images of semi clad artists performing before his father-in-law, the giggling took over.

Holly steered them to the terrace, their table giving them unobstructed views across the harbour. Beckoning a brown haired Omega over, Holly made the introductions.

"This is Pepper, one of my best servers, who will look after you. I call her Pepperoni because she likes her sausage spicy." Holly's raspy laugh created ripples of amusement through the nearby customers who were accustomed to the humour. "Pepper, this is Will and I am placing him in your care. Any problems you find me, Pepper."

Will noticed the change of emphasis in the last sentence, as if a conversation about him between the two had already taken place. Taking their drinks order and handing over the elaborate menus, Pepper exited with Holly.

"So how do you know Holly?" Will asked.

"My mother." Hannibal replied nonchalantly. "She is a trustee for the foundation and takes a keen interest in their clients, although I would say she is better acquainted with Marty than Holly. "

"You didn't tell me you knew another dual."

"My friends are drawn from many different quarters, Will and in time, you will meet them all."

They had barely finished their meal when friends started to arrive, their quiet evening for two evaporated as tables were pushed together. The trickle at first, with Darius and Bambi, his girlfriend, became a flow. Will became lost as some seated themselves around the table and others were just fleeting hellos. Hannibal merged with the group, laughing and smiling as slowly the conversation only revolved around Hannibal and his companions shared past. Another stranger, another handshake *"Hi, I'm Charles,"* the Omega found refuge by retreating into his shell. Will regretted his outfit, choosing the blazer and tie had been a mistake amid the high cotton casual style adopted by the others and wearing his glasses only added to his juvenile look. Being ignored by them began to bother him less as looking away from the table out to the harbour had become his escape. A voice called out and was acknowledged by Hannibal with a friendly gesture.

"I will be gone for a few moments." Was how Hannibal had excused himself to Will as he left the table to join two men standing on the far right of the terrace. The Omega's eyes followed the Alpha, with the feeling of being an abandoned child creeping over him, Will ignored another chair being scrapped back in expectation of occupancy. The female voice brought him back with a jolt to his current surroundings.

"So you're Will." Her smile showed a row of brilliant white teeth. "I'm Felicia. It's nice to finally meet my replacement."

The woman with long black hair and dark soulless eyes had seated herself opposite him, thereby placing the Omega directly under her mental microscope. There was an air of expectancy within the group and it slammed hard into Will, his Omegan instincts working to full capacity sensed an attack. The whole casual arriving at the club had been a carefully orchestrated strategy organised by a skilled team. A chance to punish the interloper for entering their domain and claiming one of their own.

"Bambi's father was disgusted when he heard Hannibal had married a dual. That's the trouble with the older generation, so out of touch." Darius was the first to shoot and with Will unprepared, the bullet had hit it's target.

"He was fine when he found out it was just a business arrangement." Bambi added.

"You must get that a lot, Will." Charles said. "The prejudice. Hard being the odd one out."

Will stayed silent, knowing anything he said would be pounced on.

"You're a quiet one." Felicia said as if speaking to a small child. Will looked desperately in Hannibal's direction. Still standing with the two men, Hannibal joined in with the cheers when they were joined by another.

"Some of Hannibal's oldest friends. Kept in touch even when he went to Lithuania. I suppose he has told you about those days." Felicia relished in establishing her superior knowledge of Hannibal's private life.

"Been on honeymoon yet. Let me guess sailing around the islands and stargazing." Will's face gave him away as the flicker of surprise changed into hurt as Felicia continued. "He does that with everybody, Will. I would say that is the only predictable thing about Hannibal Lecter. He knows what he likes when it come to vacationing, never varies with any of us girls."

"Well, he has to make some changes now." Darius grinned. "He used to tell the best Omega jokes. Can't do that with Will in their pack."

"Perhaps Will is the type of Omega who won't object, one of those boring housewife types." Felicia tilted her head as she inspected Will's face. "Have they given you any chores yet, Will? Clearing closets or cleaning out greenhouses."

Will's face reddened and with his heart pounding he looked once again at Hannibal, who was now fully engrossed in conversation.

"Excuse me." He said as he pushed his chair back from the table, trying to stave off their stares had proved impossible and other than to remain seated looking down at his empty plate, Will had no other option than to leave.

"If you're looking to use the facilities, Will. I'm afraid they only make provision for men and women." Felicia called out as the Omega fled.

Will saw the exit sign and was moving expertly between customers, when a figure grabbed him and hauled him right. Almost immediately another figure was on his left and crowded between the two, he was taken to one side and twisted around until his back touched the wall.

"Don't run." Holly hissed. "It's what they want."

Overcome, Will fought the urge to breakdown, the thought of strangers watching him cry helped him maintain control. "I'm not going back."

"I told Hannibal not to bring you here. Those scumbags don't like outsiders especially if they're Omegas." Holly raged.

"I'm not going back." Will insisted.

"Who was it?" Holly snapped at Pepper.

"Darius, his girlfriend and the Morgans." Pepper replied. "Felicia Morgan."

"Fucking Fellatio Morgan. I'm gonna kick her scrawny ass out of here one day." Holly burned with anger. "Will, if you go out that door, Hannibal will search for you and they'll help, pretending to care. They'll turn you into a fragile, needy, little Omega who can't cope in the real world, the type your Hannibal loathes. Do you want that, Will?"

"I can't deal with their kind of shit." Will whispered.

"Do you love your Hannibal?" Will nodded a reply. "You're married to a smokin' hot lion of a man and you are gonna have to fight to keep him. Are you gonna fight, Will?"

"I don't know how." Will was disgusted by his weak reply.

"I've gone to hell and back, been beaten, spat on, all kinds of verbal abuse because I'm different but I've never quit. Is that what you are, Will, a quitter?"

"I'm no quitter." Will's breath was ragged as anger took hold and he wanted to hit back as much for Holly's sake as well as his own. "Tell me what to do."

"I am gonna weaponize you." Holly grabbed one of Will's wrists and raising it nose high, sniffed several times. "No scent, one of those masking products. Pepper wipes please. Do you need those glasses?"

"No." Will felt foolish as Holly took the wipes and swabbed his neck and wrists.

"Then put them away, sugar, they are hideous. Right, now take off the blazer. Good boy." Holly stood in front of Will, removing his tie and unbuttoning his shirt . "Take a look around, Will, in this arena collars are on display. Now let's roll back those sleeves, Pepper, if will assist."

With Holly's fingers combing through his hair, a feeling of kinship overtook him and with it, the sad reality, he desperately missed his own kind. Taking a step back to survey the finished product, Holly and Pepper's triumphant smiles told Will everything he needed to know.

Sauntering across the terrace, Will could see Hannibal gesticulating as he spoke to the others, then the Alpha displayed relief when the Omega came into view by striding to met the boy halfway.

"I was concerned. No one appeared to know where you were." Hannibal's eyes roamed over the Omega.

"Needed a break" Will had decided bad mouthing wasn't an option. "from them."

"Were you given a difficult time?"

Will noticed the amused look on the Alpha's face when he quipped. "Nothing I can't handle."

"Still, I will ensure I stay by your side and Will...." Hannibal said casually as they returned to their table. " you look beautiful."

As Will slid back into his seat and Hannibal sat next to the Omega, Will through dark curls caught Felicia's stare and smirked.

Will undressed, folding the discarded clothing and placing them on the chair, mindful of Hannibal's tidy disposition. After undoing each button of his shirt with careful precision, he stretched lazily, exposing his near naked form to the seated Alpha. Hannibal peeled off his socks watching the Omega perform, aware the boy's persona for part of the evening bordered on the coquettish.

"You finished in the bathroom cause I need to shower." Will asked.

"I can use the guest bathroom." Hannibal saw the boy go to speak then, as if thinking better of it, close his mouth. "Mother said she would arrive around nine to collect you. I have only the two meetings scheduled tomorrow so should be home early."

"Great, I forgot about you and Frederick's joint custody arrangement." Will joked.

"Do you not want to see Frederick?"

"No, I'm good. Guess our time together has made me feel more adult." Will's mind ran through the possibilities but he had to ask. "Did you entertain Felicia here, in this house?"

Hannibal paused before replying, however brazen he considered the question, the Omega deserved a response. "In this house, yes, in this bedroom, no. I reserved one of the guest bedrooms for what you call entertaining. This bedroom I have always considered to be my personal space, an inner sanctum that is until I married you. You and you alone are the only person I have slept with in this room and in this bed."

"Thank you." Will's face was a picture of delight. As he headed to the bathroom, sashaying his hips, Hannibal refrained from blinking, wanting the image burned into his memory bank.

Hannibal was woken by the movement. Will, stretched across the Alpha, brushed Hannibal's neck with light kisses, his hips slowly moving rhythmically as he grinded against the Alpha's body. The words when they escaped between kisses were mumbled and incoherent and it soon became apparent to the Alpha this was no calculated seduction, rather someone in the depth of sleep. Will's unmistakable aroma was mixed with the heady scent of slick and Hannibal, afraid he may be tempted to manipulate the situation as his body reacted to the touches and finding viewing the Omega's attempt at self gratification voyeuristic, repeatedly called Will's name until the boy stopped and lifted his head.

"You are dreaming, Will, go back to your side of the bed." Even through the haze of semi consciousness, Hannibal's words were acknowledged by the Omega as he gently pushed away from the Alpha and lay on his back.

Holly sat at the bar, make up and wig free, short hair brushed back from the face, dressed in jeans and tee. Hannibal took a stool from the far end of the room and sat down.

"Three times in one week. I'll have to think about getting a restraining order."

Hannibal laughed and motioned to the bartender with a nod of his head. "Brandy and coffee."

"Must be bad, Han, unlike you to drink so early."

"The coffee or the brandy?" Holly smiled at the retort.

"So what brings you to my establishment yet again?" Holly took up the cup and drank.

"Will. I would like your advice."

"So I'm your therapist now." Holly held up one finger catching the eye of the bartender. "Brandy."

"Will's behaviour changed last night. His personality was different, shall we say, attentive. I am looking for insight."

"You mean it takes one to know one. What were you thinking when you brought him here? You exposed him to your acquaintances, half of whom you fucked one time or another. Did you want to show him how popular you are, how hard the competition for your attention really is or just how beautiful and sophisticated your exes are?"

"I did not arrange for everyone to descend, it just happened. My past relationships have been casual and therefore there is a clear understanding nothing bonds us together."

"But you haven't erased those memories. Will's an empath, he would've picked up on them, seen what attracts you, how you looked at them. He smells too pure to have had your rough hands all over him. He heard the gossip that you only married him for the land. Thank Randall fucking Tier for that one. It put him at a disadvantage, if being an Omega isn't enough. He was unsettled, needed reassurance that you're attracted to him, not his checking account.

"Are they saying I do not care for Will?"

"Some are, including a few in your circle." Holly took out a cigarette ignoring the no smoking signs. "Duals have guides from the age of twelve but your Will missed out. He just hit the ground running and survived the best he could. What did you see when he went back to the terrace, all hot and smouldering.?"

"I saw a version of you."

"Your friends were taking pot shots at him so I gave him the ammunition to return fire. That version of me is now embedded deep in his imagination. He can't control it, Han, when he behaves like those around him. You've seen my act, my alto ego, yet I can easily slip into me. Will can't." Holly sipped the brandy. "When I was fourteen this guy offered me serious

money if I would let him suck my dick. I felt sorry for him, was tempted, so went to see my guide. He asked me what would I do the next time some guy asked or the next or the next. Said all I was feeling was this other guy's desire, it was overwhelming me and I was convincing myself I wanted it too. That if I didn't take control of my life all I'd ever be is a set of influences. Other people's dreams and desires."

"Can Will take control?"

"My guide told me to search for my Alpha. Said I would find someone who would see the real me and keep me grounded. The day I walked into this place and saw Ernesto, I knew he was the one. He is rock solid. I can slip off the mask, climb into bed beside him and be my weak, boring Omegan self, letting all this craziness wash away. Your Will is looking for foundations and that's the role you'll have to play."

"You believe I can help him."

"Never forget, he can read people and he chose you." Holly drew on the cigarette. "You are bedrock, Hannibal Lecter. So just stay the same, the same honest, stable, stubborn, gregarious, arrogant bastard you've always been."

"You left out devastatingly handsome." Hannibal picked up his brandy.

"For looks, I'll give you a better than average." Holly laughed drawing attention from the waiters. "Duals used to be known as the two per centers because two per cent of male Omegas had duality. Today, we're closer to extinction level so we support each other the best we can. It's up to you to make this marriage work, cause if you reject him, he'll never replace you, he'll withdraw into himself."

"You are saying I have made my bed now I have to lie in it."

"Will that be so hard with your beautiful Omega by your side?"

"Perhaps not." Hannibal smiled before finishing his drink.

Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

QUANTICO - transcription of voice recording - ten weeks after rescue

GREENAWAY You call him Garrett, Will, everyone else calls him Hobbs.

WILL There was more than one Hobbs at the camp. There was Abigail, Mikey and sometimes Austin.

GREENAWAY You referred to him as my Alpha.

WILL I had no choice.

GREENAWAY He was your captor, Will and your protector. It's not abnormal for the relationship to blur.

WILL There was no relationship. He kidnapped me. *(voice raised)*

GREENAWAY Will, you're sleepwalking, having nightmares, disassociating, it's a desperate survival mechanism for a psyche that endures repeated abuse.

WILL No, not abuse. *(shouting)*

GREENAWAY Will, we've talked about Stockholm Syndrome. After a while you can begin to bond with your captor even convince yourself you are in love with him.

WILL Why do you keep questioning me about this. I've told you the truth. There was no relationship. It was all in his head. He was crazy. I had to pretend I lov...*(silence)*. Why do you keep asking me if I loved him, want me to admit ..*(prolonged silence)* You want me to say I loved him cause it would prove I can be controlled. Be someone's play-doh...*(silence)*. Who exactly are you working for?"

(JACK CRAWFORD BAU enters room.)

CRAWFORD Go to your room, Will.

GREENAWAY You have no right to intervene, our session hasn't ended.

CRAWFORD It's ended. I ended it. Will, out, now.

GREENAWAY You have no authority.

CRAWFORD Your contact with Will Graham is now officially terminated. You have precisely one hour to vacate the premises.

GREENAWAY Will needs help.

CRAWFORD He'll get help, doctor, but not from you.

GREENAWAY I'll take this higher, above your paygrade.

CRAWFORD Will Graham is officially in my care. My house, my rules, doctor. You have fifty nine minutes or I'll personally kick you off these premises.

"Yes, I remember Gustav, he always wore those tweed jackets." Bedelia replied

"He was in the club when Will and I arrived. Sent over a bottle of Dom Perignon, congratulating us on our marriage. His note said, having seen my Omega, he never realised I had such exquisite taste."

Bedelia smiled. "Will mentioned several members of your set including Darius and the Morgans were present."

Hannibal considered his response. "Their arrival was unexpected."

"Heard Felicia went under the knife, had her nose reshaped, wanted a petite look." Zeller added.

"Bless her heart." Will piped up chasing his peas around his plate. "Maybe they'll succeed next time."

Zeller's snort of a laugh prompted Bedelia's intervention. "Behave, you are acting like schoolboys."

"Bedelia, my darling, you and I both agree the Morgan family are obnoxious. I, for one, am counting the days when Alana comes to her senses and stops seeing that man." Robert intervened.

"Who's she dating?" Will asked his father-in-law.

"Charles Snell Morgan." Robert replied.

Will had misgivings the minute he knocked on the office door. Robert had called out immediately and now trapped with going through with his original idea, Will opened the door and entered part way before stepping back. One quick wipe of his sweaty palm against his jeans, he moved forward again, seeing Robert sitting at his desk peering over the frame of his glasses.

"Either it was your intention to engage in a game of peek-a-boo or you are having doubts regarding your decision to seek me out. I suggest, William, you come into my office, close the door, sit down and talk."

Will gave a shy smile and followed Robert's instructions. Sitting hunched over, he gazed at the floor before blurting out. "Hannibal's friends didn't like me."

"They were unwelcoming."

"Uh huh and insulting. It was cleverly rehearsed and meant to hurt."

Robert sigh was clearly audible. "William, we will start with you telling me exactly what was said and by whom."

Robert listened patiently as the words tumbled out, never interrupting by asking for additional information and when Will finally stopped talking, he began.

"Yes, the Charles you met was indeed Charles Snell Morgan. I would never consider the Morgans as friends of Hannibal. In fact, he has consistently tried to avoid Felicia. She's the type who once she gets her claws into you, they don't easily retract. As for Darius, he has hung onto my son's coat tails for as long as I can remember. He can be amusing but only in small doses. Like the Morgans, he is nouveau rich with no obvious talent and without any goals in life. In short they are famous for being famous."

"How would they know about the greenhouse unless someone talked. It can't be a lucky guess."

"I would suggest Alana has spoken about you to Charles in passing. I can assure Alana would never discuss you in a derogatory manner. For all her faults, my daughter is neither a gossip nor mean spirited. I could see her mentioning your activities as an example of how quickly you've become part of this family."

"You're saying the words were twisted."

"They way there were originally expressed, yes. I will talk with Alana immediately, warn her, as I have no desire for another confrontation between her and Hannibal. When it comes to disagreements they are as bad as each other, neither will back down. Therefore, my actions will be as much to protect my daughter as it is to protect you."

"And yourself." The words came out without warning, surprising Will.

Robert guffawed. "Sometimes you see right through me. Yes, and myself. I dislike contention especially in the home."

"I don't want Hannibal to lose his friends because of me. If I could find out what I'm doing wrong, then perhaps I could change it and they might accept me."

"Please don't try to change to appease them, William. You will not succeed. People like that enjoy exerting power and wounding others. It's their nature." Robert relaxed into his chair. "When I first came to this country I lived in the Beta quadrant and despite being a foreigner, I

was warmly welcomed but my brush with naked discrimination came after I married Bedelia and it came exclusively from Alphas."

Will sat in disbelief. "I thought you were accepted by the Sutcliffe family."

"For the main part, yes, but polite society....." Robert shook his head in an exaggerated manner. "It was made clear to me from the onset there were those who were campaigning against me and I am not talking about your Grandma Kade. My Omega mother-in-law never stabbed me in the back, it was her custom to launch a frontal assault as she preferred me to see the knife flashing towards me. No, it was certain members of the social set who considered I married above my station and needed to be put in my place. I was considered a hick, a grass seed."

"Hayseed." Will corrected.

"That as well. My only crime was to be different. People are cautious of the unknown, lack understanding and that can easily turn into fear. Fear makes people feel weak so they turn their fear into hate. I watched others who had been subjected to similar treatment try to incorporate themselves with those who had ostracised them, it just made matters worse. I was ridiculed because of my old fashioned values and my accent made me an easy target."

"There's nothing wrong with your accent." Will protested.

"You are being kind, William. I grew up in a time of civil unrest in Lithuania and after the coalition government collapsed the U.N. sent in a peace keeping force. The unit assigned to our area was led by one Colonel Fox. He was a wonderful man, married a local girl and after he retired from the army came to live in our town. The Colonel became a teacher and taught us English. He had an aristocratic background, attended the best schools and spoke in a particular fashion. It rubbed off on his pupils, hence my rather fancy accent."

"I like the way you speak." Will said defensively.

Robert smiled. "I developed a passion for words, thanks to the Colonel, particularly the esoteric. I learned to harness my habitual vocabulary so when one of my enemies crossed my path, I confounded them with my interlocution, then slayed them with my epigrams."

"And if they asked you to explain, they would look uneducated." Will gave a wry smile.

"Exactly and the waters in which I swim, everyone has to look as intelligent if not more so than the people around them." Robert leaned forward and tapped Will three times on the knee with his forefinger. "Tell Hannibal the same way you have told me. No secrets, William, just let him digest the information. He will do the right thing." Robert saw the biting of the lower lip, Will's subconscious sign of being unconvinced.

"I think Hannibal will expect me to confound my enemies just as you did."

"William, I would never have had the determination to face them without Bedelia at my side and Hannibal knows this." As Will rose from the chair, Robert added. "You are I are very much alike, William, we will always choose to be outsiders."

Will basked in the protectiveness as Hannibal spoke, wanting to be his little Omega, sit on his lap with the powerful Alpha arms wrapped around him. "I will keep them away from you. There is no excuse for their behaviour and they have no right to use you as their whipping boy."

"They didn't just turn up, it wasn't a coincidence." Will felt more confident than when their conversation had begun.

"I believe one of Felicia's friends contacted her when she saw us enter the club. Felicia wanted to see you."

Will just smiled and nodded before getting off the bed. "Yeah, to inspect her replacement."

"You did not replace her, Will. I ended my relationship with Felicia Morgan several months before we met."

"Why?" Will wondered whether Hannibal would brush off his question, consider it too personal.

"She constantly criticised others and took delight in their misfortune. I do not care for that kind of behaviour, Will, I find it immature."

"So if I said she's got the eyes and smile of a gator that would be childish." Will adopted his best angelic expression.

"I would have said you were making a factual observation." Hannibal smiled as the Omega giggled. "I am a creature of habit, Will. I get pleasure from sailing and knowing how much you enjoy fishing, I believed it would have made the perfect vacation. I want you to be happy, Will and if her comments have soured my suggestion, we could investigate other options."

"No, I get it. She was trying to spoil it for me. She obviously knows you well."

"She knows me no better that anyone else in that particular circle, it was prudent to stay on my guard around them, contrary to how I behave with you."

Will swelled with pride, pleased by the affirmation Hannibal trusted him. "Yeah, I'd like that, the sailing and fishing. Just us."

"Good, then I will make the arrangements and Will, I am glad you spoke to my father, he gives sound advice."

"Yeah, he does and he's got a great sense of humour." Will called back as he left the room, not noticing the perplexed look on the Alpha's face.

The boxes arrived four days after the inventories, two large one small with an accompanying note from Mr Tuesday offering profound apologies for the delay. Placed in the hallway, the strange sensation of unreality crept over Will once more, a few beads of sweat on his forehead. What was left of his entire biological family neatly packed into the boxes in front of him.

"Do you want me to carry them to your meditation room, Will?" Hannibal had stood quietly.

"I only want to open the smaller one for the time being, need somewhere safe to store the others. I don't think I can handle looking at them. Outta sight outta mind until I'm ready." Having added the finishing touches to the room only two days earlier, he wanted to keep it distraction free until his head felt it belonged on his shoulders.

"Perhaps my office." Robert called out from the doorway.

"Yeah, thanks, so long as it doesn't cause you trouble."

Hannibal picked up the first box with ease. It was only on occasions like this, the Omega appreciated how strong his Alpha was. Never crowing, Hannibal's displays of strength were only on show when needed and proportionate to the task in hand. Lifting the smaller box Will headed to the sitting room.

"Do you want to be on your own, Will?" Bedelia asked.

"No, I'd appreciate the company." Will understood the need to share these moments with the family who had opened their door to him, allow them a glimpse of his former life.

With the smaller box placed on the floor and Will having cut through the sealing tape, he carefully took out the contents. The four neatly tied bundles were placed on the table.

"Are those the letters which belonged to your father, the ones you spoke of earlier." Hannibal sat down on the couch near to where the Omega knelt.

"Yeah, they're from my dad's friends, every night he sat at his desk writing a letter to someone. Frederick said I can read anything from him, some were written when he was trying to free Abel. Called them living history. Guess I'll have to ask the other writers for their permission, when I can find them."

Will's hand delved into the box again removing two scarves. "They were my mom's." Instinctively placing them to his nose, his voice went flat, without a trace of emotion. "They've washed her scent out of them."

From her position behind the couch, Bedelia watched Will pull out another item, square shaped hidden in bubble wrap. After he carefully removed the protective covering, he remained perfectly still as if in quiet reflection before handing it to Hannibal.

"My family." The Omega spoke hurriedly, the two words melded into one.

Looking over her son's shoulder at the framed photograph, Bedelia could see the Graham family seated on a large leather couch. Parents either end, daughters next to them and centre, the curly headed boy. She smiled then inexplicably the loss hit her hard, an ache inside as if they had been her own flesh and blood.

"You have a beautiful family, Will." Hannibal said softly.

"I'd forgotten." Came the stark reply. "Everything was lost. All I had were a few photographs Frederick had taken and grainy images he downloaded from the internet."

Will's attention returned to the box and repeating the process, produced another photograph. Breaking the sombre air, the newest discovery was met with laughter.

"Eleanor Georgia Graham known to everyone as Grandma Graham ." He proudly announced handing the image to Hannibal. "Frederick said she was undeniably unique, dressed like an aristocratic bag lady."

The woman was wearing a beige dress, white shoes and straw hat, partially covering her dark curls. Holding a cotton lace parasol, she held her head high and wore her smile slightly crooked.

"You favour both your father and grandmother." Bedelia remarked.

"Yeah, it's the hair." Will picked up the other frame and momentarily lost himself in the past. "I think about them everyday. Though the sting has gone out of it, the way they died, those memories are never gonna get away from me."

Bedelia saw the boy in a different light, not just an Omega associated with bad experiences but haunted by them and could only speculate how many conscious nightmares paraded through his head. He was a wounded bird, their wounded bird and as matriarch, she inwardly vowed to do everything within her power to keep him safe.

Zeller followed Will into the bedroom holding the heat chart. Hannibal lay on the bed in jeans and white shirt, feet bare. It always took Will by surprise - the two Hannibals. A week ago his Alpha was dressed in a dark grey suit, clean shaven, hair groomed to perfection, ready to attend another meeting with yet more prospective clients. Today, he was the other Hannibal, sporting a scruff and with hair which looked like it had fallen into place. The phrase identically different came into Will's mind and he was attracted to both. Hannibal pushed himself into a sitting position, leaning back against the head board, patting the mattress by his side. Reluctantly Will crossed the room and filled the empty space. Glancing at the information booklets from Dr Tocca's office resting on the Alpha's lap, Will looked away.

"According to your chart you've had temperature spikes for at least two weeks and the stomach cramps lasted two days which is about average ." Zeller looked down at the paper in his hand.

"Yeah." Will tried to sound non-committal.

"And during those two days you passed slick in your urine."

"Yeah."

"You weren't doing anything before hand." Zeller saw the blank expression on the Omega's face. "Like touching yourself."

Will blazed. "Of course I was touching myself otherwise I'd piss down my leg."

"Hey." Zeller snapped. "I don't need this, Will. You can go back to Tocca and discuss it with her."

"I can't" Will looked at the floor. "She saw the bruising on my arm from Budge and now she's looking for other signs. Any graze, any mark and she'll think Hannibal is....."

"Will, she's decent that way. She champions Omegas and if she thought you'd been abused....."

"I've not been abused." Will snapped.

Zeller let his frustration show. "I'm talking about violence, Will, physically abuse. Alpha Omega marriages can steer onto that highway. I've seen it first hand, Will and I've patched up enough Omegas only to see them crawl back to their Alphas on the promise it will never happen again. Jeez, Will, you've no idea how depressing it is to have them come back even more damaged."

"Okay, okay, I'm listening."

"Tocca gave you a heat chart for a reason. So don't make it difficult for yourself. Has your scent changed? Got stronger?"

Will paused long enough for Hannibal to intervene. "Is that the reason of you have taken to wearing aftershave, Will?"

The Omega recalled his last visit to the sanctuary, Jimmy pulling him to one side and handing him the bottle. *"Use this, kid, it'll keep those fuckers away."*

"My scent is stronger. I didn't want outsiders to notice." Will muttered.

"Oh, great." Zeller said sarcastically. "With all those indicators in place I'll say you'll be in heat within the week at most."

"Arrangements have already been made and we will spend the time at Chandler Square."

Zeller nodded his approval to his brother. "Will, I'll help with your care initially but you've got to take responsibility for your own safety. Alpha instincts, if they are pulled into a rut, are on a base level, it's like their brains are telling them they have to fuck or die. Rape in an Alpha Omega marriage is only a crime if the Omega can prove they were on suppressants or

a form of birth control. Omegas have been attacked outside the home and the attacker has walked free because in the eyes of the law the Omega didn't take the necessary precautions . Yeah, I know it's wrong but it happens. You can't just ignore it and wish it away cause that's just plain stupid."

"I wasn't sure it was real." Will said truthfully.

Zeller accepted the boy's explanation and continued. "During the heat there's a chemical reaction that occurs in the Omega's brain which is directly linked to the reproductive system. Omegas say that sex during heat is like nothing else, it's the biggest high and like any addiction, they can't get enough. With duals you have to factor in the breeding glands, which are touch sensitive and positioned near the prostate, with the right amount of action you hit the jackpot every time. Omegas are compelled to breed during a heat while Alpha's are obligated to spread their seed and create little Alphas. It's the perfect storm."

Zeller could see embarrassment written all over the Omega's face and felt more that a twinge of sympathy. "You're too young to use suppressants or birth control without potential damage so you will have to rely on Hannibal to use protection or try an artificial substitute. The alternative is an Omega clinic where you would be offered a choice of medically approved aids and a nurse would be on duty to advise you."

Silent until now, Hannibal noticed the flush on the Omega's face. "What is wrong, Will?"

"It's embarrassing, okay. Sitting here talking to Alphas, it shouldn't be this way." Will felt his face burning and his eyes filling with tears.

"You think this is embarrassing." Zeller rolled his eyes. "Jeez, Will, if we wanted to embarrass you, you'll be talking to our father. I was a teenager when dad had to give me the dreaded talk, the father son talk which is a Lithuanian tradition. Do you remember it, Han?"

"I have spent the last fourteen years trying to block those memories." Hannibal's mouth twitched into a broad smile.

"So dad takes me into his office to make sure I understand about the birds and the bees, which I already knew from school, only trouble is dad can't say certain words. Words like cock or dick, even penis he would say p.. p.. penis. So he used the word we used when we were kids. You remember, Han, when he'd tell us to be careful when zipping up our pants in case we trapped Mister Percy."

As the bed shook, Will was mesmerized by the roars of laughter coming from his Alpha.

"Yes, you can laugh, Han, you weren't there when father was explaining how it was natural, even when you were a grown man, to tend to your urges on your own. So I'm standing there, praying the ground would open up beneath me, cause dad's telling me it's okay to let Mister Percy fly solo. Then I found out later he didn't discuss that part with you or Valdas, oh no, I was the lucky bastard to be told it was okay to take Percy out for a quick whiz bang."

Will was enthralled by the interaction between the brothers, Zeller acting with mock indignity while Hannibal attempted to contain his laughter. As his brother finally managed to take

control, Zeller ended the conversation.

"This isn't easy for me either, Will, but you're family. So talk it over, just the two of you, but make sure you're on the same page."

It was several minutes after Zeller left before Hannibal spoke. Tucking a stray brown curl behind the Omega's ear, he asked in a soft velvet tone. "What are you really afraid of, Will?"

The Omega looked into the calm brown eyes. "I'm afraid you'll find me so repellent, you won't want me anymore."

The slamming of the door alerted them to Alana's return. Before either brother had time to issue a greeting a finger was pointed straight at them followed by. "Don't"

Hannibal and Zeller knew from past experiences not to pursue the matter so continued along the hallway to the sitting room.

"Was that Alana?" Bedelia asked her sons as they took their seats.

"Trouble in paradise." Zeller commented. "I think she and Charles have had words."

"Oh good." Robert said cheerfully.

"Is everything organised for tomorrow?" Bedelia's concern for the Omega was growing.

"Yes, mother." Hannibal replied. "We will leave around mid afternoon."

"You will take care with him?" Bedelia recognised the flash of annoyance which crossed her son's face. A warning she was wandering too far into territory which was exclusively his own.

"He will be fine." Was the only reply.

Robert's chuckling caught everyone's attention as he handed his wife the tablet. "An exclusive from Miss Lounds. It would appear yet another Senator has been caught with his pants around his ankles. Donald's enemies are falling one by one."

Only part way through the article Bedelia heard a door close with force followed by the tapping of heels on the stairs. Glancing towards the door, Alana's entrance suggested someone on the verge of eruption, even from a distance Bedelia could see her daughter attempt to regulate her breathing with deep slow breaths.

"Where's Will?" Alana frowned.

Hannibal studied his sister as she walked towards him and refrained from making any light hearted remarks. "He is taking a bath."

"I called Valdas and he persuaded me to tell you otherwise I may have kept quiet. During lunch with Charles it became obvious by the comments made by his friends that there are rumours circulating about Will. They were keen to ask me about my brother-in-law. Was it true he was the lover of a gang leader who murdered his parents, when the police arrested him was he really a street urchin who prostituted himself? When I confronted Charles he said it was just a bit of mischief put together by Felicia and Darius, that no real harm was intended as everybody was the centre of gossip one time or another. When I became angry, he said *"Why the concern, Alana, its only a dual."*

The stunned silence was only broken when Robert spoke. "Alana, please tell me you have no intention of seeing this moron again."

"Oh, don't worry, father. Charles Snell Morgan will never dare approach me. After I threw my wine in his face and started to the door, I decided it wasn't satisfying enough. So when I was leaving the restaurant the second time, he was wearing the spaghetti and meatballs I had tipped over his head."

"Atta girl" Robert said emphatically.

"They were the exact words Valdas used." Alana huffed.

"Hannibal?" Robert had watched his son throughout the discourse, statue still he didn't even appear to have blinked.

"It would seem I will be seeking out an old friend tomorrow."

The evening rush had just begun, with many regulars in their places and as Hannibal entered the premises, he saw his betrayer. Will trailing a few steps behind sensed the storm was about to break, Hannibal's silence was more threatening than his angry yells could ever be. Will saw them seated in the corner, Darius, his girlfriend and the Morgans. Holly appeared from nowhere approaching Hannibal with an arm outstretched, concern showed in every rushed footstep.

"Hey, no trouble, Han. Promise?"

Hannibal stopped abruptly and Will almost walked into him. "I am planning to attend to matters discreetly."

Will felt both relieved and betrayed, hoping Hannibal would spring forcefully to his defence but glad he was relatively calm and prepared to talk things over. Holly stood to one side and as Hannibal passed he called out to Darius.

"I understand you have been voicing an opinion regarding my marriage." Hannibal's voice was strong, quietening the other customers as they watched the drama unfold.

Darius shrugged. "No more than anyone else, Hannibal."

"I am not interested in things others have to say. As yet. What I am interested in is what someone, who purports to be friend, is saying behind my back."

"Just speaking the truth. You married the Omega for the land. Where's the problem?"

"The problem?" Hannibal moved closer to the table. "The problem is your lack of understanding of the true status of my marriage and your attempts to smear my Omega's reputation."

"All those Alpha pure breeds were queuing up waiting to be asked and you tied yourself to an Omega. I get it, it's a great piece of ass. Hey, even I wouldn't mind it as a popsicle." Darius laughed as he shook his head "It has no class, Han, all you've got is a sloppy second. Come on, Han, it's a fucking dual of all things."

Hannibal heard murmurs of agreement coming from the rest of the group. "You believe those words can be said without reprisal?"

"It's a pretend marriage, so where's the fucking problem?"

The head of Darius was slammed into the table and yanked back, Hannibal's forearm snaked around the man's throat into a choke hold.

"Did you say pretend marriage?" Hannibal filled with fire and anger, snarled into the man's ear. "No, not fucking pretend, Darius, fucking real. Will is ***my Omega*** and I will remain married to Will until death do us do part. Not because I fucking have to but because I fucking want to. Now do you understand?"

The rasping breaths coming from Darius dominated the silenced room as Holly sprinted to the table.

"Hannibal. Hannibal that's enough. Don't kill the bastard, you're better than that." Holly could see the hold loosening and thinking fast, tried to diffuse the situation . "Han, my cleaning crew called in sick today, so I'll be the one getting their hands dirty scraping that piece of shit off the floor. You don't want that, do you?"

Regretting dragging Holly into the conflict, Hannibal relaxed his grip and moved away from the table. With his hand stroking his throat and taking deep breaths, Darius looked at this former friend in fear then becoming aware of the death stares coming from the other patrons, slowly lowered his head. As Will looked on in shock he could only think as Darius bowed his head, how Omegan he appeared.

"Have I made myself clear?" The response to Hannibal's rage was a stony silence permeating throughout the room. "Good, then I should not hear anymore insulting remarks about my Omega. Otherwise, my actions will not be so civilised next time."

Hannibal held out his hand to Will which the Omega took it and as they made their way to the exit, Will could hear Holly yelling. "You sit in my club trashing duals. Well, here's a message from one. Fuck off, you pigs and don't fucking come back."

Will stood just inside the bedroom door unsure of how to proceed. The walk back from the club had been almost in silence only broken when Hannibal pointed out a restaurant or bistro he intended them to visit. The Omega kept quiet, his hand firmly grasped, and repeatedly quickened his step in order to keep up with the Alpha's longer stride. Arriving home, Hannibal entered the kitchen, removing the Dom Perignon from the fridge and undoing the cage, quickly popped the cork. Pouring the contents into two plain tumblers on the counter, he offered one to the Omega. Will, heedful of the stern look on the Alpha's face, accepted.

"Let us finish this in the bedroom." Hannibal stated and a subdued Will followed behind. Hannibal drank quickly then refilled the tumbler, placing it alongside the bottle on the dresser. He glanced sideways at the Omega with an inquiring expression. "Not thirsty, Will? You hardly have touched your drink. It is an excellent vintage."

The boy lifted the drink to his lips and sipped, his eyes never leaving the Alpha, marking his position. Taking off his jacket and placing it onto the chair, Hannibal sat on the bed divested himself of shoes and socks. Finally standing and facing the boy he began to unbutton his shirt.

"I thought I would shower before preparing our meal, unless of course, you would prefer to dine out?"

"I don't mind." Will replied softly, uncertain of the best response, his heart rate increasing. The way Hannibal held himself, every move suggested something tightly coiled ready to snap open. "I'm sorry about your friends."

"There were not my friends, Will. They were people whose company I enjoyed from time to time."

"Still, I'm sorry. It's my fault your reputation has taken a hit." Will shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "Mud sticks. It may have been slung at me but I married into your family."

"My reputation is intact, it is their reputations which have been damaged. Darius slandered you in public, with the support of the others, breaking protocol on every level. To verbally abuse an Omega in those circumstances will ensure exclusion from Alphan society, especially an attack on one so vulnerable and blameless. They have no defence for their actions."

"Are you glad this happened?"

"No, I did not realise you would hear the insults first hand. I intended to beat Darius into an apology if one was not offered but my marks would only have been temporary. The damage he inflicted upon himself is far more lasting. It will take years before he and his cohorts will be let back into the fold by which time you will be fully integrated." Hannibal returned to the dresser and his drink, downing half the contents whilst staring at Will. For the first time Will heard hesitancy in Hannibal's voice as he spoke. "Are you scared of me, Will. I have no intention of hurting you, Will, if that is what you believe."

"It's not your anger but your control of it that's scares me. You planned to beat him and waited till it best suited you. That's cold and calculating, contrary to what I thought was your nature. Do you always keep command of all your emotions?" With heightened awareness, Will could feel the strange tension between them.

"In the past I was naïve and exposed a vulnerable side. Perhaps lessons learned the hard way developed my ability to shield my innermost emotions. I am often described as stoic however, I will not tolerate an attack on you, even if it means I have to discard my unemotional façade. "

"Did you do this for me or for you?"

"Do you believe I am so concerned for the family's reputation I would brawl in public. Is it so difficult to accept that I care for you?" Hannibal almost growled.

"I know you like me." With the Alpha's heavy masculine scent teasing his senses, Will was ashamed of his body's reaction as a strong pulsing began between his thighs.

"I care for you, Will, I care for you deeply." As Hannibal crossed the room, Will took one step back but didn't protest when pulled into the kiss.

The Alpha lay awake, sleep escaping him, when Will changed position again. His mind replayed the kiss, perturbed how the urge had overwhelmed him and how he had behaved impulsively. The blocker's effectiveness had waned and the Alpha captured the boy's sweet scent as he inhaled. Rolling onto his right side, with his back to the Omega, he disciplined his body by conjuring up images of blueprints of apartment blocks yet to be built. Hannibal felt the covers being thrown back as Will left the bed, hearing the soft padding of feet across the floor as the Omega made his way to the bathroom. Hannibal's attempt to drift into the darkness of sleep was disturbed when the steady stream of running water was periodically disrupted, Hannibal imaging the Omega splashing water on his face with a cupped hand. Returning to the room Will stopped at the closet, now intrigued, Hannibal pushed himself up into a sitting position and reached for the night stand light. Hannibal watched with fascination as the Omega, dressed only in boxers, fumbled inside the closet before pulling out a white shirt.

"Will, Will are you awake?" Hannibal tried to decipher the incoherent mumble as the Omega slipped on the shirt and headed for the bedroom door. Hannibal's amusement at the situation disappeared and twisting out of bed, he was by the boy in seconds.

"Hey." He said grabbing the Omega's arm. "Where are you are going, Will?"

"Outside. Need fresh air. Too hot." Even standing apart, Hannibal was hit by the heat radiating from the boy's body. His attempt to feel the boy's forehead with his hand was thwarted when the Omega pulled away.

"Don't touch me." Will hissed before crying out. "What's happening to me, Hannibal?"

Hannibal had been aware the boy's behaviour had been out of character for most of the evening. Quieter and withdrawn Will picked at his meal, his gaze never reaching higher than the Alpha's chest. Hannibal had considered it to be a reaction to the day's turmoil but now captivated by the Omega's fragrance, Hannibal he knew he was wrong . "Will, you are going into heat."

The Omega turned, palm flattened against the wall. "I'm thirsty."

"Will, I will fetch you water but you must remain here. Do you understand?"

"Yeah, stay here." The words came out in short gasps.

Hannibal opened the bedroom door and glanced back at the Omega, reluctant to leave him for too long, he bounded down the stairs into the kitchen. Grabbing a bottle of water from the fridge and a tumbler from the counter, he returned to find the Omega standing with his cheek placed directly against the wall.

"It's cool." Will murmured as sweat pooled around his neck.

Hannibal filled the tumbler with the cold water and offered it to the Omega who drank greedily. "Will, you need to come to bed. We need to manage this."

"No, you'll hate me, I'll debase you. All that simpering and mewling."

The words hit Hannibal hard and he regretted every syllable. "I am truly so sorry, Will, but you have to let me help you."

"No." Will's protestation almost slid into a whine. "I don't want your kind of help."

"Will, we have discussed this. You agreed to let me aid you."

"Yeah, fuck me with silicone." Will began to laugh, then as he touched Hannibal's face, he panted out. "I want a real Alpha, not a pretend one."

Hannibal could see Will was spiralling out of control and grabbed him by his shoulders, knowing his Alpha scent would temporarily calm the boy.

"You need to submit, Will, make it easier."

The words were met by more laughter, bordering on the hysterical. "Wow, make it easier. Why didn't I think of that. All those times I took those beatings, I could have made it easier by saying yes."

The Omega allowed Hannibal to pull him nearer, now inches apart. With fingertips brushing through the mass of hair on the Alpha's chest, the boy looked up provocatively and in a honeyed breathless tone whispered. "If you had kidnapped me, I would have let you fuck me."

Breathing faster and with the Omega's uncorrupted scent tempting him, Hannibal visualised the boy, sweated curls stuck to his brow and confused grey eyes, writhing under him. He felt

the rush of desire as he demanded. "Obey me, Will."

In a beat the boy's mood changed to dark and defiant. "Fuck you, Alpha, make me."

His world spun as he was thrown onto the bed, Hannibal on him, straddling him, wrists twisted into submission. Unmistakably aroused, the Alpha's voice against his ear growled. "Do not resist me again."

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal/Darius scene adapted from Charlie Countryman

Colonel Fox - a younger Edward Fox who starred opposite Hugh Dancy in Daniel Deronda

Chapter 34

"You felt the need to tell Will about the rumours." Bedelia had needed clarity.

"I did not want him to hear them second hand." Her son had replied.

"And when you confront Darius?" Bedelia had asked.

"It is important for Will to see for himself that we do not endorse those words and to know if he comes under attack, I will always respond."

"And when in the throes of heat he tells you he loves you, how will you respond then?"

"Three over used meaningless words designed to entrap."

"No, Hannibal, when Will tells you he loves you, it will come from his heart and with the wrong response, this Omega could easily shatter."

"Then I will express my true feelings."

"And how would you describe your true feelings?"

"When Will strayed into my life, he took me hostage. Gradually I realised the portrait of my life would be incomplete unless I painted him onto the canvas. He is the first thing I reach out for when I wake and the last thing I think of before I sleep. Without him there would be an empty space in my life which could never be filled.

"If you stood before a jury, accused of being in love, I have no doubt you would be found guilty."

His arms either side of the boy, Hannibal looked down at the Omega. Even through the haze of heat, the boy still fought for control.

"I love you." Will laughed in a hopeless fashion and as Hannibal moved his hand to stroke the boy's face, he heard the gentle absolution. "You, you don't have to pretend you love me."

There was an essence to the words which unsettled the Alpha and he pushed away from the boy, feet back on the floor, he walked to the dresser. He picked up the bottle and drank the flat champagne, wiping his mouth dry with the back of his hand, his gaze never leaving the Omega on the bed who was losing his battle. Will rolling over, pushing onto his knees, arms folded across his body, rocked back and forth whimpering in distress. Hannibal knew the Omega would soon become frantic for contact, even the lightest of kisses from his Alpha

would release the endorphins into the Omega's system, briefly quenching the arcing desire. As the Alpha took another drink, he could only guess how much time would elapse before the Omega would grovel, deliriously pleading for his Alpha's touch. Hannibal had known this before, the Omegan shift into euphoria preceded by total submission. The idea this boy, who had fought so hard, would be on his knees begging graphically to be filled loaded Hannibal with rising distaste. He knew himself too well and unlike other Alphas, he couldn't derive any pleasure from fucking a mindless toy.

Four steps and he was back at the bed, climbing onto it and across in easy moves until he was in reach of the Omega. The boy lifted his head once the Alpha was near, tentatively stretching out an arm, letting his fingers smooth over the biceps. His hand on the nape of the Omega's neck, fingers tangled in the curls, the Alpha pulled the boy roughly towards him.

Hannibal waited until startled eyes, more blue than grey, stared into his before growling. "If you were taken from me, I would burn everything down until I found you."

Will looked for the lie which didn't exist and when he couldn't find it, he gave in. Hannibal took the boy's mouth, his kisses on the gentle side of rough and when he pulled back for breath, the Omega leant forward, letting the tip of his tongue flirt between the Alpha's lips. When blue eyes drew the Alpha's attention, he could see the spirit in them and with more force than needed, stripped the shirt from the boy.

"You are beautiful." Hannibal sighed as his hand skated down the boy's bare back and hearing him gasp, the Alpha kissed him, tenderly biting the Omega's lower lip.

Turned suddenly, the Omega had to lean back against the Alpha's chest. Left arm across the boy's body pinning both arms to his side, Hannibal revelled in his dominance. His right hand moved across the boy's flat stomach until fingers slid under the waistband of the boxers. His touches light as he glided down the Omega's erection, his thumb stroking the boy's length. The Omega's moan, the smell of slick and sweat from arousal pushed Hannibal to the edge and a long buried growl of desire escaped the Alpha's lips as he tugged the last garment free from the boy.

Hannibal released his grip, shedding himself of his night wear as the boy lay prone on the bed. Will sought him, rubbing his face against the Alpha's chest, inching his way up until he could nuzzle the man's neck. Back in a kneeling position, the Omega panted with delight as the Alpha's hand travelled up his thigh. Emphatically male, Hannibal took the boy's hand in his, made him feel the weight of the Alpha's balls, the hardness of his length before demanding.

"Tell me what you want, Will?"

A breathy *"Breed me"* was the only reply. Hair unkempt, lips moist, beads of sweat on his brow, the boy smouldered with sensuality.

Cupping the Omega's face, the rut began to consume the Alpha and he smiled. "I am going to enjoy you."

His hand smoothed over the boy's back and pert ass until he found his goal.
His fingers probed, stroked where the boy had never been touched. His brain was hot-wired. Lust, the hot burning coal inside of him, urged him on. The Omega's head swayed to every stroke of the finger and with a gentle bite to the neck, the Alpha pulled from the Omega another moan. Overcome by his own nature, the boy was malleable and allowed the Alpha to place him on his knees and hands, arching his back into a picture of Omegan submission. His quick glance at the Alpha gave him away. This was no dream like state, his smiles was entrancing and inviting, his eyes still holding a challenge.

Hannibal knew he wouldn't last long, there was no time for teasing, the scent of arousal was driving him insane. He wanted to own the Omega, ruin him, enjoy him like no other had. Breed or die. He watched as the swollen head of his cock slid into the boy then finding the right rhythm, he felt his balls clench and unclench with every thrust. He leaned forward and tugged the boy's hair, his hand sliding around until he gently grasped the Omega's throat. A gesture to the Omega that his Alpha was now in complete control. Hannibal could feel his balls tightening, his breathing quicken and his heart pound in his chest. His knot reached the point between pleasure and pain and with each thrust more solid and deeper, he finally forced it inside.

Sensation sparked between cock and brain, his need for release governed every action, hands briefly leaving the Omega's hips to spread the boy's legs wider. His hands gripped firmer, his low animal noises drowning out the Omega's gasps and moans. His sounds now just a guttural growl, the Alpha moved harder and faster. With the boy having no choice but to accept what was given, the Alpha powered out his seed driven by the primitive desire to breed.

He was spent, depleted, emptied, he recalled every suitable word as he waited for his knot to wane. He had taken his weight on his arms, not wishing to burden the Omega underneath him who was still breathing rapidly from the afterglow. As the Alpha gingerly pulled free and rolled over onto his back, wiping the sweat from his brow with the back of his hand, he chuckled as his cock twitched reminding him it was still attached. The movement from the left was followed by a hand on his arm and he turned to see the worried look.

"Was it okay?" The Omega asked hesitantly.

Hannibal pulled the Omega onto him, the boy's chin resting on his chest, the eyes searching the Alpha's face for assurance, only relaxing when he heard his Alpha speak.

"Okay? You were glorious." Hannibal huffed out. "Next time, I am going to scrutinise every inch of your beautiful face as I take you."

He awoke laying on his stomach. Head turned to one side resting on the pillow which was placed across his folded arms. Hannibal sat in the chair nearest the bed, one leg crossed over the other supporting a large pad.

"What are you doing?" Will murmured still dozy.

"Sketching. You look so serene laying there, I needed to capture the look."

"Gonna hang it in your home office?" Will could never contain his sarcastic comments.

"No." Hannibal smiled. "This is for my private collection."

"Didn't know you had one." Will replied.

"I have now."

"So I just happened to be laying here near naked with the sheet draped over the back of my legs."

"I did not pose you, Will. Please do not move, it is almost finished."

Will lay still until he saw the Alpha rise from his seat and put down the pad. "I will fetch some refreshments, fruit is always best after the heat."

"I'm cold." Will smiled. "I need you to warm me."

Hannibal smiled in return, undoing his robe, he arranged himself over the Omega. His fingers brushed against the Omega's lips and the boy parted them, licking the tips. Will sighed with advanced satisfaction, anticipating he would soon be full and stretched again. Musing over the realisation, ownership was a two way affair.

Hannibal entered the bedroom carrying the tray, clearing a space he placed it on the side table and glanced at the Omega, laying full stretch on the bed, arms extended with sheet up to his midriff.

"You need to eat." Hannibal spoke as a parent would to a child and as the Omega pushed himself into sitting, Hannibal climbed behind him positioning himself with back against the headboard and legs either side of the boy. Will shuffled keeping hold of the cover until he could lean back against the Alpha's chest and when settled, Hannibal reached for the tray placing it on the boy's lap.

"Try the apple, Will, you will find it refreshing. Sweet but with a faint trace of sharpness." Obediently the Omega took a slice and bit into it.

The Omega's scent was still evident, not as strong but enough to incite arousal in the Alpha.

"Why are you wearing jeans?" Will asked between bites.

"A neighbour, she asked for help, said her car would not start though I believe it was a ploy to discover who was staying here with me. As I was wearing just a robe when she called, I put on suitable attire to aid her."

"Lucky you didn't wear the robe, if it had gaped open, she would have had a huge surprise."

Will heard a chuckle and experienced a dash of delight, proud he had amused his Alpha. "Is this how it's gonna be, me always trying to please you?"

"The more heats are shared, the divisions between Alpha and Omega become blurred. We will put each other first before anyone else. My protective nature will intensify, certainly no sane Alpha would dare make advances on you. In return you should be compelled to make me happy, bending to my will, certainly in matters of importance."

"You said should be compelled not will be." Will felt uncertain.

"The scenario of you being subservient to me, in all probability, would appeal less to me than you. I do not consider that type of relationship desirable. "

"So if I had wanted to be subservient to you, that would have been a problem?" Will was already fighting the urge to guarantee his unwavering obedience to his Alpha.

Hannibal mused over the question before answering. "I believe in honesty, Will, even if the truth hurts and in my experience I have met Omegas who are masters of deceit, who will obey as long as it suits their needs. A healthy relationship can only survive where there is trust and compromise therefore we need to set ground rules designed to make us both happy. I prefer to see us as equals thereby removing the need for you to use your wiles in order to reverse a decision."

"You think I have wiles?" Will laughed.

"I believe there is a side to Omegas that even Omegas have trouble addressing. Whereas I do not believe you are dishonest, I would suggest if a decision did not go your way, you are more than capable of wiggling your little derriere in order to gain the advantage. Alphas can be fools where their Omegas are concerned."

Will didn't need empathy to see Hannibal had left the door open. "I used to think you hated Omegas but it didn't make any sense. Why marry one if you carried around prejudice?"

"Bad experiences." Hannibal's voice sounded almost nonchalant. "When I lived in Lithuania it was usual for Beta officials to have trophy wives. Always Omegas, much younger than the Beta, always attractive and neglected. It was not uncommon for these ladies to seek Alpha companionship and young Alphas not looking for commitment would accommodate the needs of these women. It was a practise from which I was not exempt. Later when I lived in Paris I met a very special woman, an Omega, older who I believed to be everything I had ever desired. She was a model, independent and very, very beautiful. We did everything together, she opened my mind to operas, theatre, the arts, she said she wanted to broaden my outlook. I saw a future with her and she told me she loved me but would never share her heat, not wanting me, she said, to see her undignified. Later a friend whispered in my ear and told me that this Omega had certain preferences and would often share her heats with those with similar tastes. The phrase the more the merrier springs to mind. I confronted her and she did not deny the accusations instead informed me that my function was purely for

sexual satisfaction and for her to enjoy the jealousy of her friends when they saw a young Alpha buck on her arm. I was her trophy Alpha."

"Ouch." Will said sympathetically. "I bet that hurt."

"Yes, indeed." Hannibal replied.

"You haven't had much luck with Omegas."

"No, Will, I have not had much luck with Omegas until now." Hannibal's fingers traced a pattern down Will's neck.

Will took another slice of apple and snuggled against the Alpha. "Did I tell you I find it sexy when I'm naked and you're clothed."

"There were times over the last forty eight hours when you demanded I should don my clothes. Now we must both get ready as we have to return home."

Will moved the tray to one side and Hannibal returned it to the table. He was amused as Will attempted to wrap the sheet around himself before leaving the bed in a vain attempt to cover his nakedness. "These women in Lithuania, were they much older than you."

"Their ages varied, here the women would be called cougars. Why do you ask?"

"This neighbour, I wondered if I should be worried. She could have designs on you."

"She is sixty if she is a day." Hannibal watched as Will almost crawled to the end of the bed. " And Will, if any smart remarks come out of your smart mouth, I swear I will place you across my knees and smack your behind."

Will looked over his shoulder and grinned. "So, she's too young to be your cougar then."

As the Omega made his escape, Hannibal moved faster, grabbing the boy's trailing leg by the ankle and dragging him back. Between giggles and shouts of *"no"* Will was lifted and placed across the Alpha's thighs.

Hannibal feigned anger. "I warned you, Omega."

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry." Will laughed as he felt the palm of one hand placed firmly between his shoulder blades holding him down and the other tap his bare ass.

Bedelia saw the coats on the hall stand. The house was quiet, too early for Mrs Lake to start the evening meal and the Beta staff, who appeared to work more efficiently since the exit of the former housekeeper, had left early. She made her way to the sitting room and saw them from a distance in the sun room. Facing each other, Hannibal had his arms around the Omega's waist, his hands resting on the small of the boy's back. Will, in return, had placed his hands on the other's shoulders and looked up lovingly at his Alpha. The kisses

was no longer chaste but full of passion and as Bedelia retreated not wishing to intrude on this private moment, her usual graceful tread was more of an up tempo swing.

Chapter 35

He had put on the blue shirt Bedelia had purchased, the jeans he had bought in Baltimore and preened his hair one more time. Will looked at his reflection and wondered if he appeared different to others since his heat, relishing the memories of the wantonness nature had forced on him. He checked his face again, other than his eyes which seemed a shade on the blue side, visibly he appeared the same. Inwardly he felt more mature, completely sheltered and wore a smile of contentment. The first time he and Hannibal walked down the path to the stables since their return, Will felt his place alongside the Alpha was now a right rather than a privilege. The niggling doubts he had harboured regarding his relationship with Hannibal had completely vanished and he had a surety the Alpha's interest lay only with him.

Donald's arrival was accompanied by the usual fanfare with agents combing the grounds and securing the gates which to Will seemed better suited for high level talks rather than the everyday chatter which resounded around the dinner table. Hannibal's announcement was in the same casual mode he always used whether for important news or the mundane.

"Will and I will be leaving in a few days. I have allowed for a vacation before the meetings formalising the city plans take up all of my time ."

"Anywhere interesting?" Donald asked.

"The Caribbean. Sir Charles Dimmond has given us use of his yacht and chateau as a wedding gift."

"Anthony's father has always liked Hannibal." Bedelia told her brother.

"You have been given the necessary permission from NOGA I assume?" Robert expected his son to comply with the rules even though he considered them ridiculous.

"Naturally. I contacted Mr Tuesday and he was happy for Will to be taken out of the country. He sounded impressed when I mentioned the Dimmond name." Hannibal had managed to keep his tone polite whilst talking to the man, irritated NOGA still controlled aspects of his Omega's life.

"Hannibal and Will aren't the only ones taking a vacation. I am going away at the end of the month." Alana announced.

"New boyfriend?" Donald enquired.

"Ha!" Alana said dramatically. "I've given them up for good. No, I am going to Europe with a few of my girlfriends from med school."

"As I will be spending more time on my White House duties, this household is going to be rather quiet. With these radical changes on the horizon you will need my full support." Said

Robert.

"More like shielding my back." Donald said half in jest.

"Father's a grizzly when it comes to protecting the family." Alana grinned. "He even obtained all the surveillance footage from the restaurant where Charles Morgan and I had our contretemps."

"As I explained, my darling daughter, I did not want you to be the star of the television news should someone decide to sell them. With the press looking in your uncle's direction over the next few weeks, anything to do with this family could be blown out of all proportion."

"Especially my sister meat balling her boyfriend." Zeller's quip earned the usual glare from Bedelia.

"These changes, Uncle, how far reaching will they be?" Hannibal ardently supported his uncle but the businessman inside always kept a watchful eye on the path Donald was treading, mindful of his own enterprises.

Donald set down his knife and fork and leaned back from the table. "Thirty years ago major changes were made to the Omega Care Bill. At the time Omegas were guaranteed financial support if they bred but the changes meant they would receive aid for just two children. As most employed Omegas were paid a pittance it became a form of birth control. What you have to take into account is worldwide the Omegan population has been decreasing substantially over the last century. The Spanish Influenza outbreak, estimate eighty million dead throughout the world, ninety per cent Omegas. Wars, civil unrest, epidemics, pandemics, with every catastrophe the Omegas were the hardest hit. Alphan economists condemned the changes, pointing out Alphas had always depended on Omegas to breed. They called the changes Alphan suicide but the Government chose not to listen and unfortunately, the economists were correct. The latest statistics show eighty five per cent of Omegas mate within their own group. Omegas seeing their own dynamic heading for extinction have kicked the Alphas into the kerb. Why mate with an Alpha or Beta and possibly produce no Omega children when with another Omega they are a certainty."

"The tables are turning." Will stated. "It's the Alphas who are being bred out of existence."

"Exactly and because of the Omegan employment restrictions here in the States, our Omegas are migrating to countries which do not discriminate. We have to stem the tide."

"You can't seriously intend to set back the clock to the days when Omegas only function was to breed." The surprise sounded in Alana's voice.

"We have been presented with an unique opportunity to sweep away the old ideology and I intend to wield the broom. With effect from next month, Omegas will now be allowed to progress above junior management level. In six months time Omegas will be granted the right to serve in the military in a non-combative role. In twelve months time all laws which prevent Omegas joining the secret service, judiciary, law enforcement will be eradicated. Each time one fortress of discrimination falls another bastion will be stormed."

"Even the Presidency?" Will ventured, stunned by Donald's vision.

Donald grinned. "One day, Will, even the Presidency."

"And how will you pay for these changes, no doubt everyone will cry out they cannot be implemented without extra funding." asked Hannibal.

"All budgets have been frozen. The extra finance already in the coffers will be diverted to help pave the way." Robert interjected. "Julius Hatcher from the Treasury is already meeting with those who were anticipating an extra piece of the pie. He is a remarkable man, he can persuade you a reduction in your budget can be afforded then make it seem it was all your own idea."

"You're bribing us." Will said awkwardly. "Giving us promotion, extra money and security in the hope our biology will kick in and we'll have larger families."

"Will, I'm aware of the irony, an Alpha President enhancing Omegan rights in the hope of saving Alphas. If the Sutcliffe family hadn't always championed the Omega, your statement would make me drown in hypocrisy. Your generation, will soon have the chance to become anything they want. Anything."

Hannibal had been wary when they stepped on board the yacht scanning for anything which could present a threat to his Omega. The three man Beta crew had been respectful, the captain readily giving Hannibal control of the vessel, acknowledging the Alpha's nautical expertise and was willing to blend into the background unless requested otherwise.

As they sailed around the islands, Will was in a state of constant wonderment, lapping up every piece of information Hannibal supplied. Whether Hannibal was giving historical or geographical facts or simply pointing out the constellations, Will was enraptured, hanging on to every word. Equally when Will had been casting a line into the water, sitting for hours until the bait was taken, his mind had bathed in the tranquillity of the sea.

A few nights had been spent sleeping at sea, the rest in the chateau with the Omega always ready to please. No longer giddy from his heat, the boy was a willing although timid partner, an attempt to relieve his Alpha's obvious arousal had descended into a hesitant and clumsy affair.

"I'm sorry, I was no good. Haven't done this before." Will kept his gaze downwards, his voice cracked with emotion as embarrassment took hold.

"Inexperience is nothing to be ashamed of, Will." Hannibal was sympathetic as the Omega's insecurity rose to the surface, combing his fingers through the boy's hair. "We will learn from each other as we build a future together."

Studying the boy's face in the moments when the Omega was overwhelmed by pleasure thrilled Hannibal. Used to assertive lovers in the past, the Alpha harnessed his natural aggression when his vigorous behaviour was at times too much for the sensitive Omega. A soupcon of discomfort on the boy's face was enough to keep the Alpha in check and Hannibal reawakened his tender side which made the experience more intimate and exceptional. Afterwards, when the Omega slipped into post-coital sleep, Hannibal would commit to memory the boy's facial expression, the long black lashes and the dark chocolate curls framing his face.

There was a prudery to the boy outside of the heat. Though sweet and accommodating between the sheets, the Omega had always grabbed a robe or towel to wrap around himself once leaving the confines of their bed. The few times Hannibal had walked around naked, the Omega had looked away and rather than tease the boy about his coyness, out of respect, Hannibal had always ensured his robe was placed within reach. Will's modesty was unfeigned, he blushed when complimented then apologised for blushing, an unmistakable Omegan quality. Hannibal, in quiet reflection, was startled by his own attitude. He enjoyed sex, had many different partners over the years, some fleeting, others regular but when it came to his permanent mate, the one who would carry his children, he was prideful Will had been unclaimed. The protectiveness, he had described to Will, was already rearing it's head, he would emit a hostile glare at other Alpha's who came too close, a declaration that the Omega by his side was taken.

They had explored, observed the skies, sunbathed and Will, dressed only in shorts, had been chased across the sand of their private beach by his Alpha before being caught and pinned to the ground.

"You must obey, Omega." Hannibal struggled to keep the pretence of a serious tone as Will dissolved into laughter. "You must bend to my every whim."

As their laughter slowly died down, Will had looked into the rich brown eyes and told himself he was the luckiest Omega alive.

"We will come back, Will, I promise." Hannibal had said, as they stood on the beach on their last night. With his arms wrapped around the Omega, Will felt his back being warmed by the Alpha's bare chest. The feeling of uncertainty muscled it's way in and Will could feel a something gnawing away, telling him, he and happiness never stayed in touch for long.

Will hadn't expected the whirlpool of activity when they returned home but crisis after crisis due to Donald' proclamation seemed to rule the household. Unflappable was the word which suited Robert's approach, Will decided, as he overheard his father-in-law talking to one of the President's detractors over the phone. A meeting of opposing opinions was arranged at the house and as the gentlemen sat in the garden drinking Robert's finest wines, the wily Alpha had persuaded all of them to cross over to Donald's side.

Hannibal's decision to ease himself back into work was reversed when during a meeting with city officials he had found himself elected their goodwill ambassador. "The committee wish for the public to see what goes on behind the scenes whilst the planning for the rejuvenation takes place and they believe I am the right person to be their representative. Baltimore news will be covering my activities over the next few weeks so my schedule will be disrupted."

Will kept Bedelia company when Robert's long days turned into nights, knowing she missed her husband and whilst Hannibal's appearances were haphazard it wasn't much different to how things had been in their past. Bedelia's selection for viewing were the only occasions Will dreaded, her love of historical romances left him so bored he took to raiding Robert's library instead.

"Where's father?" Zeller had asked seeing his father's empty chair at breakfast even with the extra workload, the Alpha liked to start the day in the company of his family.

"The White House." Bedelia's voice had the sound of resignation. "Years after it ended, it would appear Julius Hatcher has rekindled his love affair with alcohol. He's been absent for several days and a welfare check has found evidence of heavy drinking."

"Wasn't he the guy who disappeared for months only to turn up in Alaska." Zeller inquired.

"The very same. Richard Walsh has taken over Mr Hatcher's duties so your father is filling in for Walsh as the authorized messenger for the White House. He will be very busy but at least your father can now work from home. "

Robert glanced at his watch as Freddie made herself comfortable, he had chosen conducting the interviews at his club to give himself the home advantage. One journalist at a time, he had insisted, having seen others bamboozled when questions were thrown en masse and with very little persuasion, the White House had agreed to allow Freddie to join the journalistic pack.

"Miss Lounds has a large readership and over the years has learned the art of manipulation. She can whip her readers into a frenzy or calm them with her keystrokes. She allows them access to the dirty secrets of the rich and famous and keeps her readers admiration by presenting her victims as unworthy." Robert said as he presented his case for her inclusion. "As the President will need public opinion behind him to implement these changes, it is my intention to keep her sweet and firmly in our camp by giving her the one thing she desires, namely credibility."

Freddie could smell the bull when the press secretary had called to arrange the meeting, her interactions with Robert Lecter had given her all the political insight she needed. Lecter had been different from the rest, no matter how deep she had tried to dig, the only accusation ever levelled against him was that he was boring. As she got used to the man, she discovered his waspish sense of humour and his witty observations, but she was also keenly aware it was not sensible to make an enemy of him.

"You are trying to seduce me, Mr Lecter." Freddie fanned her face with her notebook in a mocking style.

"You flatter me, Miss Lounds, I am afraid I am too long in the tooth to partake in romantic dalliances."

"You are enhancing my status. You have granted me an interview alongside journalists whose works appear in the most prestigious journals."

"I have granted these interviews to lay out the President's plans for the reforms. As someone who works with the public and sees their struggles first hand, you are more aware than most the difficulties they have to surmount."

"Honestly, Mr Lecter, I doubt if my readers give two hoots for the reforms but I will gladly support the President as you clearly know how to treat a lady. By the way, is there any news regarding Mr Hatcher, I understand he is missing in action."

"The official statement issued by the White House made it clear he was taking a leave of absence due to personal reasons."

"I heard he was on vacation with Jack Daniel or was it Jim Beam." A smile twitched across Freddie's face.

Robert chuckled at the remark. "I am not sure either of those gentlemen would be a suitable companion for Mr Hatcher."

"As you have shown me this courtesy then I shall reciprocate. Someone is following the trail which led to my discoveries about Will Graham. A contact in Louisiana emailed me. He had been approached by a gentleman who works for a radio station. It is only a matter of time before the story which you have persuaded me not to publish surfaces. When this story breaks the public reaction will depend on who breaks it. You can try to track down this individual but another will soon take his place."

"How do you think I can remedy this situation?" Robert asked the question with a tilt of his head, keeping control of his facial expressions after the unexpected surge of anxiety.

"Persuade Will to tell me his side of the story. I can promise if I had an exclusive interview with him, I will make my readers adore him, want to protect him, rip into pieces anyone who badmouthed him. He would become the Omega who survived against the odds. You cannot control the press, Mr Lecter, sooner or later Will Graham's story will be told."

It was early evening in the confines of his office when sipping his brandy that he cursed the press. His thoughts centred on Will and how he could continue to protect him. He had thrown Freddie Lounds a bone in the shape of Clark Ingram *"he is under investigation for Omega abuse - allegedly"* but he wasn't sure he had enough sacrificial pawns left on the board to keep both Donald and the Omega safe.

If he recounted his day, Hannibal's narration implied exasperation whenever the news crew were mentioned. Wrong light, wrong sound, wrong weather the delays were endless and for the first time since they had married, Hannibal conversed in Lithuanian with Robert even when Will was present. Having bounded into the Alpha's home office one morning hoping to spend time with his mate, Will received a verbal slap to the face.

"Do not distract me when I am working."

Hannibal had been quick to apologise, finally admitting he was feeling the strain. Restless turning during sleep or reading reports to the early hours meant Will didn't need much encouragement when Hannibal suggested the boy should sleep in his own room. Late night messages saying he would be sleeping at Chandler Square became more frequent prompting Hannibal to reassure the Omega.

"Hopefully this would only last a few more days."

Will retreated to his bedroom and lay on the bed reading. The call from Sutcliffe House requesting Bedelia's help with Kade came early afternoon. Bedelia's reluctance to leave the boy on his own had only subsided when Walt Foster agreed to stay within earshot of the house while she was gone. Will heard the front door slam and the heavy footfall climbing the stairs and even before Hannibal entered his bedroom, Will could smell the Alpha's scent. There was a shuffling, kicking off shoes and a deep sigh, followed by the closet door opening and closing and the clink of glass against glass. Will could see the tension dripping off the Alpha as he walked into the room sipping his whisky and the quick predatory glance he gave the Omega made Will shiver.

"Bad day?" Will said as he placed the book on the side table and got up from the bed.

"It is completed. No more entourage following in my wake, no more director asking me to elaborate on the simplest of facts. It was sudieu, adieu, auf Wiedersehen, goodbye to them all." A tip of the tumbler and the liquid was gone, Hannibal savouring it before swallowing and putting the tumbler down.

"Do you want...." Will was pulled forward by the hand now wrapped around his neck, the kiss passionate and determined.

He could taste the liquor as the Alpha's tongue slid in an out of his mouth. The Alpha's hands were on the hem of his tee which was yanked up and over his head. Will had barely enough time to undo the button on his jeans before he was pushed back onto the bed and his pants pulled off. Hannibal took off his sweater staring at the boy with calculated intent then slowly removed the rest of his clothes. Will, knowing his body belonged to his Alpha and was going to be used solely for his pleasure, writhed on the bed. Will knew he couldn't stop him, didn't want to stop him. He was wet and ready when Hannibal was on him, in him, without a word. The Alpha's breath was hot and heavy, their pace was fast and desperate with Will panting into his Alpha's neck. Will moaned each time he was penetrated, deeper and deeper. Their bodies moved in perfect rhythm, finding each other's lips, they kept them touching as they reached their frenzied release.

As they lay side by side with Hannibal's hand caressing the Omega's face, Will sighed. "I guess I kind of needed that, Han."

"I guess I kind of needed that too, Will." Hannibal whispered between smiles.

The show was given a Friday slot and Will and Bedelia settled down on the couch. Hannibal slumped in Robert's chair emitted a cursory interest but Will could tell there was an aura of anxiety around the Alpha having had so much responsibility placed squarely in his lap.

Zeller wandered in as the introductory music played and received a "don't" look thrown at him by his mother. One view of the exicited Omega was enough for Zeller to keep hold of his sarcasm, not wanting to spoil the boy's enjoyment. From the opening shot Will was lost, his Alpha was handsome, magnificent with every controlled hand gesture or tilt of the head filling the screen. The athleticism and litheness of his body sent a quiver from Will's shoulders through to his toes. Engrossed Will reacted to every aspect of the show. He smiled when Hannibal smiled, felt concern when his Alpha appeared worried and chuckled on the few occasions his Alpha laughed out loud.

"Will, Will." Bedelia whispered and he turned in acknowledgement of his name. "Will, you're purring."

"I..." He felt his face flame and aware all eyes in the room were on him, managed to stutter. "I, I didn't know."

"I am sorry, Will, I didn't mean to embarrass you. I was surprised, I've only heard the very young and the.. Never mind. It's very endearing." Will smiled as she patted the back of his hand and as he turned back to the screen, he caught a look on Zeller's face he couldn't fathom.

His scent had altered fractionally each day and he had pushed it to the back of his mind but now back sharing a bed with his Alpha he had to accept ignoring it, wouldn't make it go away.

"They announced on the news the tibia of a flesh eating dinosaur has been discovered near Baltimore. As the creature is yet to be named, I was going to suggest they call it the Alana Lecter, a strange being which kills it's mate by stoning it to death with meatballs." Frederick relaxed in his armchair, happy Will had paid him an unscheduled visit. "I heard on the grapevine she and Snell Morgan were involved in a lover's tiff."

"She was defending me, Frederick. Certain members of polite society don't care for duals."

"Polite society more like impolite society. So she defended you, well don't expect me to cosy up to her, her finicky over dramatic know it all attitude ruffles all my feathers." Frederick

rose from his chair. "Are you sure you want another lemonade, Will, I have some apple cider in the refrigerator."

"No, no, Frederick, lemonade will be great."

"Still wearing the aftershave Jimmy gave you. I hope it's keeping the enemy at bay."

Will smiled and nodded as Frederick made his way out of the room. In one swift move, Abel took out the pregnancy testing kits from the bag carefully placed by the side of his chair and handed them over to Will who tucked them into the inside pocket of his jacket.

"I believe the saying shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted applies to your use of Uncle Jim's Alpha repellent."

"I know." Will hissed. "But how can I tell him. How can I drop *"oh by the way, Hannibal and I have had sex"* into the conversation."

"Difficult but not impossible. If the condition you find yourself in is of a positive nature you will have no alternative. It would be calamitous if the nefarious grapevine announced Will Graham has been knocked up by his Alpha before Frederick had been informed. He would be devastated."

"And he's going to be devastated if I'm carrying. I can't win, Abel, I just can't win."

The first kit had shown positive and not willing to believe, Will had gone through the same routine with the second only to obtain the same results. Alana's return had forced the issue, a scent blocker free vacation had cleansed her system and he could no longer chance dowsing himself in aftershave. The risk he would one day forget to apply it was high and common sense told him the ramifications for being deceitful would be far reaching.

Hannibal back from his ride had taken a shower, putting his wallet, watch and keys on the bed. Will carefully placed the digital wand and instructions near them then fled. He paced the sunroom until Bedelia and Alana came into view and as they took their seats, he looked past them. Hannibal stood for a moment in the doorway then quickly advanced towards him and when the Alpha's arm looped around his waist and he was gently pulled into a kiss, Will felt his fears wash away.

"Good news?" Bedelia asked innocently.

"It is time to get your knitting needles out." Hannibal grinned. "You are going to be a grandmother."

Will had expected either joy or disapproval even anger but all the Lecters behaved in the same maddeningly polite manner. With no enthusiasm just acceptance Will was both disappointed and sad. He put it off until the evening when he guessed both Abel and Jimmy would be present before sitting on the edge of his bed and picking up the phone. Frederick's response had been a *"Oh, I see, well I suppose it was inevitable. I need time to get used to*

the idea, Will." before the call abruptly ended and as Will let the phone slip from his fingers onto the floor, he leant forward and sobbed. He was grateful it was Hannibal who found him, made him lay on the bed, held him until he was cried out and as he drifted into sleep he saw the absent family he desperately needed as he waded into the stream.

"They were reacting to your muted behaviour, Will." Hannibal explained when Will asked if the Lecters were pleased with the news. "Your overall demeanour was one of the proverbial deer in the headlights. They were following your lead."

"If I'm honest, I don't know how I am supposed to act." Will confessed. "I'm scared. Think sometimes maybe I'm too young. Got these doubts running through my head now it's a reality."

"Will, you do not have to go through....."

"Don't say it." Will stopped Hannibal before he said something they may both live to regret. "I want a family. Just got a bad case of the jitters."

Doctor Tocca slotted Will in within days and after the physical examination and taking blood insisted Hannibal wait outside the room.

"You have a small window if you require a termination. These things can be carried out discreetly. Even the Alpha can be convinced it was by nature's own hand."

"Do you think I was forced into this?" Will was beginning to wonder if the whole universe had ganged up on him.

"It is not uncommon for Omegas to discover their Alphas have taken advantage of their heat. You are very young, Will, your Alpha agreed to take responsibility with regard to birth control."

Will took in quick breaths to contain his anger. "Well, maybe I was just so damned hot he blew all his fuses or maybe we are just too much in love to care."

"Be careful with love, Will, it can destroy you." Will's empathy swamped him and he wondered which Alpha had destroyed Doctor Tocca's trust.

The confirmation of the pregnancy came two days later and Will accepted his life was about to turn into a waiting game, with the world carrying on around him as usual, he would have to reinvent his routine. The realist inside of him was also ringing a warning bell, it would only be a matter of time before tongues would wag and he would be the focus of their attention before something juicier took centre stage .

Franklyn watched as Tobias made his way to the table, the sure powerful stride made the Alpha stand out. Franklyn was glad the restaurant was practically empty as he doubted the other Alpha would receive the news well. He was a Senator and understood the freezing of funds, knowing full well the money they had raised on the tours would keep them afloat. He held no blame against Donald or the others, being born to an Omega mother, Franklyn was secretly elated real Omegan progress was about to ensue.

Tobias wasn't surprised the restaurant was packed with his many admirers and gave a discreet nod to the applauding diners as he passed by them heading towards his table. He understood their need to pay homage, to bow before him and possibly touch a living legend. As Franklyn wittered on mixing local gossip with serious concerns,Tobias gave him his secret smile. In his head the countdown had just started to the day his greatness would be acknowledged worldwide, the day both Sutcliffe and the betraying Omega bitch Graham would die.

The fact Robert had suddenly called them together meant trouble. Will could see the serious look on the Alpha's face and automatically run through any possibilities which would affect them all.

"Richard Walsh, an adviser to the White House is missing. His car was found abandoned outside Baltimore. As nothing has been heard from Julius Hatcher, the secret service now believe these disappearances could be linked so the FBI have been called in. As a precaution, I have been assigned a designated driver, an agent who will drive me to work of a morning and bring me home and knowing how thorough these gentlemen can be, will probably insist on tucking me into bed. As both Walsh and Hatcher were frontline, I am not unduly worried but as from this moment the security gates will be in operation and we will keep each other advised of our whereabouts."

"Do they have any suspects?" Will asked.

"Until there is a clear motive the FBI have taking the stance everyone is a suspect. Walsh was retracing Hatcher's steps and the people they were dealing with would be considered respectable, not the type to feature on America's Most Wanted list. On the morning of his disappearance Walsh had met with the Bishop of Baltimore and Franklyn Froideveaux and even these men, of all people, have had to produce alibis."

"Most murderers have alibis until they don't" Will said.

"Do you think the Bishop is capable of murder, William?" Robert asked.

"Most people have thought about killing someone one way or another, be it by their own hands or the hands of God. The Bishop may have an alibi but maybe he has a supportive friend who has not."

Will went to his meditation room, grabbed the laptop and powered it up. Robert's words were still playing through his mind creating havoc with his mind set. Recalling Budge's ramblings about the Lecters had the alarms in his head reverberating. Taking into account his suspicions about this man could be fuelled by his own encounters with the Alpha, Will cleared his head and typed.

Richard Walsh's mysterious disappearance made him the man of the moment. His biography easy to find and as Will clicked onto the man's name, the financial adviser's entire life appeared on the screen. The list of banks where Walsh had worked captured Will's attention when he recalled Douglas Wilson's demise and the location where his body had been posed. Will closed his eyes and focused on the pendulum swinging as he had done countless times at his grandmother's house. Within seconds the images inside his head began to play out and the puzzle pieces scattered around him slowly fitted into place. Coming back to reality took it's toll and when his head slumped forward and eyes opened, the hyperventilation had already kicked in. He could hear Abel's voice calm but charged with authority, reminding him how to breathe and he soon regained his composure. Clearing the search history from the machine, he returned it to the table and carefully got to his feet. His hand automatically rubbing his stomach in circular motions, he decided affirmative action was his only option.

He wandered into the garden and establishing no one was around pulled out the phone and immediately tapped in the number. It seemed an eternity before the familiar voice answered and without preamble Will said. "I need your help."

Chapter 36

"Former First Lady speaks out. Former First Lady, Kade Prurnell Sutcliffe spoke exclusively to TattleSociety about the latest book on the trial of Oscar Warren. Warren, a Virginia Omega with duality started out in radio, eventually given a daytime television slot, he became one of the best loved chat show hosts of his day. Achieved in an era when duals had limited rights and were legally classified as non specific gender or dynamic status, unless bonded with an Alpha, Warren passed himself off as an Omega before famously outing himself on his show during a fierce debate with members of the Beta health council. Charged with violation of Section 1478b by reason of gaining employment under false pretences, Warren was defended by Virginia attorney Wade Prurnell and Aaron Sutcliffe. In the book, The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing like the Truth, author Steve Linklater claims the trial was orchestrated by the Government to enable the removal of the controversial Section 1478b from the statute books. Linklater also claims the Governor of Maryland, prosecuting District Attorney Humphrey Dougherty and Judge Michael H Worth conspired with Prurnell and Sutcliffe before the trial and that Warren willingly outed himself after being approached by key figures in the Government knowing that as a much loved television personality and ardent fund raiser for many charities, he was guaranteed huge public sympathy and support.

As part of the evidence to support his theory, Linklater highlights the fact that for the first time in judiciary history, Judge Worth allowed an all Omega jury to be appointed to decide Warren's fate and suggests the jury selection process was rigged in favour of carefully chosen Omegas who were involved in the conspiracy. He also states that although Judge Worth instructed the jury to find Warren guilty as technically he had breached the law, he corrected himself and described Warren's actions as circumventing the law instead. When the jury came back with it's not guilty verdict, Judge Worth sympathised with their decision and described Section 1478b as evil before declaring a mistrial.

In an exclusive interview, Kade Sutcliffe pours scorn over Linklater's conspiracy theories. She told me that Linklater's book was just another rehash of the same old arguments with nothing new being added to the pot. Pointing out that both her father and Aaron Sutcliffe were completely committed to enhancing Omegan rights and had taken on other controversial cases long before the Warren trial, she said,

"The notion my father and Dougherty could sit down on the same side of the fence is ridiculous. My father loathed Humphrey Dougherty, called him Humpty Dumpty even to his face. As for the verdict, my father always said it was Aaron's closing argument which swayed the jury. When Aaron pointed to Oscar Warren in the courtroom and said if anyone could see him they must be hallucinating because in the eyes of the law he did not exist, everyone understood the law was stupid. As for the jury, well, my daddy always insisted, after years of being downtrodden, it was an Omegan "up yours" to the rest of society."

Robert took a sip of wine, his throat scratchy after reading aloud the latest offering from Lounds. "Miss Lounds is firing a warning shot across our bows. Letting us know how easy it is for her to bring us to the attention of the public. From now on all of us have to keep on our toes. I'm afraid the golden rule which has to be obeyed is silence is golden and I'm afraid this must apply to friends as well as acquaintances. Nothing leaves this house."

"It didn't seem that bad" Zeller remarked "for Lounds."

"No, I agree but Lounds is notorious for twisting facts. If we say nothing then a denial can be issued and she can be undermined. Make no mistake, Lounds is tricky. Apparently she accosted your Omega grandmother and her sister Gretchen in the ladies rest room of the restaurant where they were dining, getting past your grandmother's security detail"

"I was misquoted." Kade protested as she pushed her empty wine glass in Will's direction and nodded toward the bottle of Chateau Fontaine on the dining table. "They're keeping me dry in case I'm naughty."

Will looked to Bedelia who nodded her consent. "Half a glass."

Will poured the wine to the invisible halfway mark on Kade's glass and joked. "You don't need wine to make you naughty."

"I'd rather be naughty than dull." Kade laughed and leaned sideways to plant on kiss on Will's cheek before turning to Zeller. "I was misquoted, my darling, my daddy never said up yours. He didn't use those words."

Will saw the trap the same time as Robert. Will shook his head and mouthed a "Don't" in his brother-in-law's direction while Robert barked. "Leave it alone, Zeller."

Zeller bit back, tired of being chastised by his parents. "Hey, what's the problem, dad. I was just going to ask Grandmother what her father really said."

"Fuck you." Kade chuckled.

Robert groaned and rolled his eyes, glancing at the open door of the dining room, he saw the two agents by the doorway still standing to attention. Donald's only concession to an increase to security was to allow agents to be present inside the houses he was visiting.

"My father said it was an Omegan "fuck you" to the rest of society." Kade continued.

"The agents, they are discreet?" Robert asked Donald in a low voice.

Donald knew both men well and by lowering their heads he was aware they were trying to hide their grins. "Don't worry, Robert. They're very fond of Kade and very discreet."

Robert had waited until after they had said their goodbyes to their guests before touching Will on his arm and saying.

"We need to talk, William."

Motioning to Hannibal to stay in the hallway, Robert proceeded into his office with the Omega following a few steps behind. Sinking into the comfortable leather chair, Will watched as Robert walked towards the window. *"Most people have thought about killing* those words were not your own."

"Quantico. Beverly Katz one of the agents who rescued me, she was still a trainee. I kinda clung to her so the let me stay with her during some of her lectures." Uneasiness never strayed far from Will when he ventured back into the past.

"I thought perhaps as one of Jack Crawford's star profilers, they had started your training early?" Robert turned to face the Omega before Will could speak. "William, I have tried my best to protect you but my attempts to keep you safe are set to fail. I pride myself on my bargaining strategy but I'm afraid I may have met my match. Hannibal must be party to this conversation as he must be involved in all decisions made in this room whether you agree or not."

It was several minutes before Hannibal seated himself in the chair adjacent to Robert's desk and with father and son virtually sitting side by side, Will felt under inspection. Will didn't need to be told that Robert had given his son an indication as to how the discussion was heading, judging by the serious expression on Hannibal's face.

"Before it was discovered our former housekeeper was drugging you, it crossed my mind fleetingly you may have engaged in some form of attention seeking. I contacted Jack Crawford and when I asked if he thought you were capable of such actions, he was very forthright in his reply. Said if I suspected you of such behaviour, then I didn't know you at all. I based my assumptions on the redacted accounts of your past we had been given. Thanks to Special Agent Crawford, I obtained the unaltered versions. Sometime ago I entered into a devil's bargain with Freddie Lounds. Miss Lounds was quite happy not to report any rumours true or otherwise concerning the Lecter family if in return, I would give her the occasional snippets of insider information regarding the political scandals which were on the verge of enjoying their fifteen minutes of fame. It has been a mutually beneficial arrangement over the years. When you and Hannibal married she informed me she had a wallet full of information about your past and to ensure her silence we entered into a new agreement so our mutual back scratching continued. Unfortunately, I may have overplayed my hand by asking her to view both you and Donald in a favourable light in her news reports. It would seem Miss Lounds no longer finds our arrangement adequate. She has suggested that someone is digging up your past and has requested that you give her an exclusive interview to scupper the enemy, so to speak."

"You do not believe her." From the tone of his voice, Hannibal knew his father had doubts about Lounds.

"No, I do not." Robert replied. "Miss Lounds never leaves a trail and she protects her sources, therefore I do not believe there is a mysterious other investigating. She is merely testing the water to see if we might take the bait."

"What does she have on me?" Will knew he couldn't escape the tornado heading his way.

"I did not inquire." The older Alpha replied. "But if she has at her fingertips the information contained in the FBI reports, it will be enough to inflict critical damage. Miss Lounds has a way with her, in her own small world she has become the self proclaimed moral compass for the masses or rather, for the sheep who follow her. She dispenses her own kind of gossip, permitting fear to creep into her rumours. If the truth about you gets out, and one day it will, she can make this a lot better for you or a lot worse."

"You want me to agree to be interviewed." Will gasped.

"Good grief, no. The disappearance of Hatcher and Walsh has meant I have had contact with the FBI including the Director so I seized the opportunity and mentioned my plight. It would appear the FBI have already a statement on file should journalists ask questions about you. There is also a recording of a Mr Miggs appearing before the grand jury in which he categorically denies you were a willing participant in any wrongdoing."

"Miggs was in the pay of the FBI. He was given full immunity for all prior acts and placed in witness protection. To present his evidence as independent testimony would be a lie."

"You seem reluctant to spring to your own defence. I have to admit to selfish reasons for wanting to quell the kind of publicity Lounds would generate. I am concerned how this news would impact on the Lecter family name and on you. I am fiercely protective of my children, William, and although I have always referred to you as my son-in-law, recently I have become aware the in-law part is frequently missing when I speak of you."

Will managed a weak "Oh"

"The Director suggested we need to join forces and I wholeheartedly agreed. He sent me a copy of the FBI's version of events and we need to set to work to ensure your story and the FBI's story tally. With both of you singing from the same hymn sheet, any accusations levelled at you could be made to appear as an example of prejudice because of your duality. In the meantime I would like to throw Miss Lounds a bone. Your pregnancy has become an open secret, even Senator Tier extended his congratulations, suggesting as an Alpha, I must be hoping for an Alpha grandson. If Lounds is allowed to break the news with official approval, it will buy time and keep her tame. "

Will snapped. "If they print my name, if Garrett sees it...."

"Will." Hannibal's voice commanded the attention of the Omega. "I will insist it is a formal announcement and you will be referred to as William Lecter. We are not of such importance that the news would spread outside of Baltimore. We cannot leave this to chance."

"I've donated a lot of my memory to the time spent with Hobbs, I hoped I could leave it all behind when I came here." Will said dejectedly, accepting his whole life was about to be opened to the elements. "I'll tell you everything so we get the stories straight but so that we're clear. I'll tell you everything just the once and then we'll be done cause I'll never wanna go there again."

Will eased himself out of the chair and considered going back to bed and hiding under the covers to get away from the world. Hannibal, already standing, placed a hand on Will's

shoulder.

"Will, men like Hobbs always make threats. It does not mean they will carry them out."

"You don't understand." Will replied. "Hobbs is in love with me. The only way I could stay alive was to let him think.....let him think I was in love with him. When I didn't give evidence at his trial it reinforced his belief that I was his and would never betray him. He wouldn't come here out of revenge but out of love. He'd believe he's saving me."

Will took a step then stopped. "I'm curious. What did you say to Senator Tier?"

Robert paused before answering. "Oh, yes, yes. I told him my grandchild would not only be loved and cherished by two wonderful parents, but by the whole of the Lecter family as well and being a man with a strong moral framework, I considered the whole gender and dynamics thing uncivilised."

Will was suddenly swamped with emotion. "It's a boy. My scent, it's deeper, richer. I'm carrying a boy."

"Train set it is then." Robert stated.

"And if it was a girl." Will tentatively asked.

"Train set." Robert smiled. "I believe in equality."

With his back pressed against Hannibal's chest and the Alpha's scent enveloping him, Will finally began to relax. He hadn't needed Hannibal telling him that Robert's actions were done out of fondness. Will valued the blossoming friendship between him and his father-in-law. He could hear the Alpha's breathing regulate as he drifted into sleep, his arm across Will's midriff, keeping him close and feeling safe. As he looked into the future, Will could see them on the boat, he, his Alpha and their son drifting across still waters and out into the world.

"I love you, Han." Will would whisper when he was sure his Alpha was asleep, then pretend to hear the words "I love you too, Will." whispered back.

Bedelia was always impressed by Hannibal's culinary skills. There was a natural gracefulness in the way he prepared the food. She often found herself looking at this tall, handsome Alpha wondering how on earth she could ever have carried him inside her. A complete man, was how Donald described his nephew on more than one occasion and with his obvious physical strength and strong personality, she could never find fault with the assessment. To outsiders he was a formidable individual but underneath the boldness, a layer of sensitivity resided. Private with his emotions, she and Valdas were the only two to have seen him openly cry, but everyday with his Omega, through a touch or a smile, she had observed pieces of his outer shell being whittled away.

"What time are you going to pick up Will from the Sanctuary?"

Hannibal gave a quick glance towards the kitchen clock. "In two hours. He and Frederick have paperwork to attend to now Will is expecting. It would appear a few of the Southern State inheritances automatically transfer to Will's children if they are Alphas. I fail to see why Frederick insists on going through all the paperwork with Will."

"Frederick is very thorough, Hannibal. Some may consider it fussy but it could equally be described as diligent. Still, you must be happy Will and Frederick are reconciled."

"Will and Frederick have shared memories of the Graham family, therefore will always enjoy an unique bond and I am glad Will has someone to remind him of the happier times."

"Are you intending to bond with Will. Your father informed me Will is still worried about his safety." Bedelia watched as Hannibal tipped the chopped vegetables into the pot and added the stock.

"He is too young to bond. My personality would overcome him as he has yet to hone his own."

"Yet not too young to carry your child."

"This bothers you?" Hannibal's gaze locked with his mothers. "You gave the impression of looking forward to being a grandmother."

"I am both pleased and excited. I am also concerned you and Will may have rushed into this."

"Will has never hid his desire to have a family."

"And you have never hid your lack of desire for a child." Bedelia retorted.

"People change. Perhaps I am of an age where all my wild oats have been sown and domesticity appeals. Maybe I lost control." Hannibal said wistfully.

"Hannibal, you have always shown great control over all aspects of your life."

"You will not be happy until I provide you with an appropriate answer." Hannibal took the wooden spatula and began to stir the soup. "During some of our conversations Will has expressed a regret that he survived when his family did not. Even when surrounded by our family, he appears to be lost in thought. I am not convinced, in certain circumstances, Will would be willing to save himself and that concerns me greatly."

"You have described the symptoms of depression."

"Are you not the one who has always insisted Omegas can only thrive when surrounded by their own kind? It is not possible my lack of control was influenced by a desire to stop Will feeling alone?"

"His own flesh and blood may help him look to a future but you have committed yourself to a lifetime with Will. I am not sure if caring for him is going to be enough in the long term for either of you." Bedelia didn't try to disguise the tetchiness in her voice.

"I no longer just care for him." Hannibal released his grip on the spatula and faced his mother. "Since being with Will I have discovered a simple truth. You cannot control with whom you fall in love."

Chapter 37

Doctor Tocca had assured them changes in eye colour during pregnancy were natural for duals and had spent the majority of the consultation subtlely excluding the Alpha from the conversations. It was obvious Tocca didn't care for him or, he suspected, Alphas in general, but Hannibal's back was broad and he could overlook her indifference after she made it abundantly clear the Omega's health was her main priority.

"The average length of an Omegan pregnancy is thirty seven weeks, but statistically Omegas with duality are more likely to give birth at thirty five. At our next appointment we will go into greater detail about the physiologically adjustments your body will be make." She explained to Will. "The scan shows your pregnancy is progressing normally and I can confirm you are carrying a male child."

Amidst the smiles and Will's mental self congratulations for scenting correctly, Tocca added her last barb of the session. "You must be pleased, Mr. Lecter. Alphas usually want their firstborn to be male."

"I am pleased that both Will and the child are in good health." Hannibal chose to ignore her petty baiting, knowing her mind was set against him.

After they had left the building, Hannibal couldn't contain his sarcasm. "I was quite impressed how well she hid her blatant dynamic prejudice."

"Welcome to my world." Will sniggered.

Tocca's attitude had made Hannibal scrutinise every look or word thrown in their direction. He had known his mate's striking looks enhanced his thoroughbred status, it would have been believed only someone powerful would have been able to stave off the advances of other Alphas when courting the Omega and overtime he had grown used to the lustful stares when they were in public. But now with eyes wide open, Hannibal could see not all the attention was amicable. Of the three Alphas who had inspected the Omega when they entered Holly's premises, the two males had exuded desire while the female showed antipathy. His anger running hot through his veins, it took all his self control not to confront the woman and when taking their seats on the terrace, a sick realization hit him, if born an Omega, his child could experience the same discrimination.

Hannibal breathed in Will's scent and glanced at his mate, revelling in the Omega's delicate beauty. The boy's hair was mussed up by the occasional strong breeze which hit them as they sat enjoying in the picturesque view.

"Something wrong?" Will asked, aware the Alpha was now staring at him.

"I was appreciating your beauty, Will."

Will's face turned it's customary red. "Sorry, I feel like a fool, blushing anytime you pay me a compliment."

"Do not apologise, Will, it is endearing. Shows you have an absence of conceit."

The boy smiled and drank the remainder of his freshly squeezed orange juice and as they made visual contact, Hannibal could see Will's eyes were a deeper blue. He saw the Omega straighten and a flicker of consternation crossed his face.

"It's okay, I know that look anywhere, I'm not going to stay." Hannibal recognised immediately the jovial tones of Franklyn. "I wanted to congratulate you both now Miss Lounds has spilled the beans. Well, I knew about your news before it became news, so to speak. Baltimore's society is too small to keep things secret."

"Thank you, Senator." Hannibal replied. "We thought it would be better if our news was official to stop the gossip."

"Those gossips are dreadful." He grinned as he shook Hannibal's hand. "Though everyone's agreed any child of yours is guaranteed to be a head turner with such handsome parents."

"I did not know you frequented Holly's." Hannibal remarked having difficulty imagining Franklyn enjoying the burlesque.

"The restaurant has a chef who creates the most wonderful pastries. I'm afraid pastries are my downfall. I'm only in the vicinity as I'm helping my friend Tobias move some of his belongings into my home."

"You and he are.....?" Hannibal left the rest of sentence hanging in the air.

"No, no, no. Tobias and I are just friends." Franklyn squirmed. "His shop is being remodelled and he needs somewhere safe to store his collection of musical instruments, they are quite valuable. It was a spur of the moment thing and as I live alone in a large house there is plenty of places to store his belongings. Oh, but his freezers were difficult to accommodate, so they found their way to the basement. He's quite particular about what he eats, only the finest cuts of meat are good enough for Tobias. Still I mustn't loiter, Tobias is expecting me. Toby can't abide lateness."

Hannibal waited until Franklyn disappeared from view before he spoke. "You were quiet, Will. You do not care for Senator Froideveaux?"

"It's not the Senator, it's the company he keeps. He'd be wise to find a new friend otherwise he might discover pastries aren't his only downfall."

Will was now relaxed during the night, snuggled up against his Alpha, an arm across him holding him close, his nightmares were a thing of the past. As the pressure on his bladder had increased, extracting himself from his haven had become a nightly routine. The first signs he was leaving the nest was met with a faint growl and when he returned and

repositioned himself, he heard a contented rumble deep in the Alpha's chest. The sense of belonging was overwhelming coupled with the knowledge that in the morning after his Alpha had left for work, he would be sending a flurry of links to his fellow conspirators, the sensation he was no longer alone vaporised any upsetting memories still circling the drain. With his conscious thoughts drifting away, he felt the Alpha's nose pressed into the crook of his neck scenting him and a spasm of joy rippled through his body.

Alana showed Will another of the baby bodysuits she had purchased. "I felt idiotic asking Walt Foster to store these bags in his home overnight because you believe it's bad luck to have anything for the baby in the house before it's born. I'll drop them at Sutcliffe House on my way to work."

"I know being superstitious is kinda stupid but if I went against it and something happened." Will said trying not to think of the possible consequences.

"Mrs Foster is an Omega, Alana and quite possibly followed the same routine. Your Aunt Cassie refused to have anything intended for the baby in the house until after the birth of Nicholas." Bedelia said in Will's defence. "This superstition most likely evolved from a time when it was common for three generations of Omegas to live under the same roof so an outbuilding was specifically reserved for birthing. It was where the paraphernalia associated with a new born was kept and a place where an Omega could give birth away from the noise and bustle found in the home."

"It is what makes you content which is important, Will." Hannibal stated. "Sutcliffe House is large and Donald is sympathetic."

"You've finished your show and tell, right, cause I caught an early shift." Zeller whined at his sister.

"Ta da." Alana announced as she pulled the teddy bear from the bag placed on the dining room table. "I decided to keep our family tradition going as I doubt Hannibal will."

Zeller checked his pocket for his car keys and gave the bear a quick inspection. "A plumber. You want our nephew to be a plumber."

"He's a fisherman." Alana rolled her eyes. "I thought rather than chose a profession I would predict his hobbies and as Will fishes....."

"The Sutcliffe family had their own traditions." Bedelia recounted. "When the children were old enough they were taken to a shop in Washington which made bears dressed in clothes which defined their profession. Whichever bear was chosen was supposed to indicate the profession the child would follow."

"I chose a doctor." Alana sang out.

"Me too." Zeller added.

Will glanced at his Alpha as he pushed his chair away from the table waiting for him to comment.

Hannibal looked at his watch. "I am running late."

"Didn't your bear wear a tuxedo." Alana grinned at her brother.

"Business suit." came Hannibal's terse reply.

"No, I remember it was a tuxedo." Zeller enthused. "You called him Mister Tux."

"You named him not I." Hannibal growled. "When you were very young you became upset when I told you he had no name. That was when **you** named him."

"But you called him Mister Tux." Zeller continued

"To appease you."

"I remember him lying next to you in bed. His little furry face peeking above the bed clothes." Zeller laughed. "It's like it was yesterday, instead of last year."

When Robert came into view the laughter died down. Robert's walk was heavy with gloom, his face ashen and when he opened his mouth to speak the first time no words came out. The second attempt produced a voice of disbelief.

"Donald called to inform me the body of Richard Walsh was discovered last night in a bank in the Washington area. First reports suggest poor Richard was a victim of the Chesapeake Ripper."

Will waited until the house was almost empty and when Bedelia excused herself, having to organise guest speakers for the Omega clinic, Will seized his chance. Returning to his bedroom he pulled out the phone. Having memorised the number from the card Jack had left, he tapped in the numbers but when his call was answered he changed course and instead of Crawford asked for Katz.

"Tell her it's Will Graham." Will tried to sound older and assertive, hoping they wouldn't ask him to state his business, knowing he was in no mood to spin a yarn off the top of his head.

Katz's voice was still the same and after her. "Hi, kiddo, what's up?" Will dived straight in.

"Richard Walsh, the body in the bank, I know you may not believe me but....."

"You know I can't talk about a case." She hissed.

"Bev, my family could be in danger."

The silence was only broken when Will could hear faint voices in the background. Beverly spoke quickly. "They think it's the Ripper."

"Was he displayed?"

He endured another stretch of nothing before she said. "Walsh looked like some freaking abacus."

"It isn't the Ripper. I think, I think I know who the real killer is. He killed Walsh and Douglas Wilson. He's probably killed Julius Hatcher too."

"Got proof?"

"Nothing concrete."

"Got anything other than your infamous imagination?"

"I'm working on it."

"Does your Alpha know what you're doing, Will?"

"Hell, no. I don't want any of the Lecters involved." Will paused before speaking again, his voice edgy. "You asking about my Alpha, is this some kind of protocol thing?"

"It's no state secret you're pregnant, Will. I may step on the line but if I crossed it and a pregnant Omega miscarried because I put them at risk, Jack would personally kick my ass out of here."

The gap before Will spoke again was prolonged, only his laboured breathing down the phone kept Beverly aware the Omega hadn't ended the call. "If I can't convince you I know who the real killer is then both me and my Alpha could wind up dead."

In her mind's eye Beverly saw the imaginary gun Will was holding being raised to her head. "Give me a meet date when you're ready. It's going bat shit this end, so give me some leeway. Jack is under pressure so some hard facts not just half baked ideas and Will, don't do anything stupid. Promise?"

"I promise, Bev."

She could see as she walked into the office Jack was deep in thought. Jack turned his scrutiny from the reports on his desk to Beverly.

"The Walsh case. You told me once I should follow all leads even if the source is a little strange." She said.

"If all else fails, yes." Crawford was always straightforward, no bells or whistles. "What degree of strange?"

"He's a little different." Beverly shrugged.

"Different how?"

"He thinks differently."

"I see." Beverly watched as Jack took a deep breath and nodded his head. "Is there a reason you didn't come to me before talking to Will?"

"He just called."

"Just called?"

"He thinks he's in danger."

Jack glanced around his office and heaved a deep sigh. "If he is in danger then you should do what you believe your job entails. Do you know what your job entails?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then do it."

"I hate being this neurotic." Franklyn remarked as they walked toward the lodge. "I'm afraid I'll say something stupid and disappoint you."

"Disappointment comes when one's expectation aren't met. I have never expected you to be able to communicate at my level so you cannot disappoint." Tobias said phlegmatically.

The small house situated on the edge of the Froideveaux estate had a soft grey exterior, the front door painted a dark blue, the small shrubs and rose bushes framing the frontage added to it's charm.

"This is where I was born." Franklyn announced with a wave of an arm. "It was just me and mother, she was a second. It was back in the days when an Alpha could take an Omega as a second wife and still remain married to his Alpha wife. My father lived in the big house, as my mother called it, with his Alpha wife and sons. If only I had been born an Omega and not an Alpha, they may have accepted my sensitivity."

"And you would walk from here to the Sutcliffe home." "Tobias inquired.

"Yes, there is a path through the wooded area. My mother and Kade Sutcliffe were good friends and so was Donald and I."

"Show me."

"It's probably overgrown." Franklyn protested.

"Show me." Tobias repeated. "To deepen our friendship, I need to understand your past and can only do that by walking in your shoes."

The final part of the drive to the Sanctuary had left Beverly filled with foreboding especially as Jack had given her a free rein. His way of showing absolute trust and approval was by letting her decide whether to follow Will's lead. Witnessing first hand Jack's unintentional grooming of the Omega at Quantico had been her wake up call, aware Will was susceptible to the fantasy of the FBI family, she had no intention of luring him back into the fold.

Will had hated pretending everything was normal as he had mulled around the Lecter home waiting for the day when the rendezvous with Beverly would occur. Part of him sentimental, longing to see the agent who had rescued him but part was dogged with a sense of frustration wanting the show which would expose Budge to get on the road. He was loathe to admit it, even feeling a little nauseous at the truth but the death and the subsequent discovery of the body of Richard Walsh had been one huge favour.

Beverly was barely out of the car when Will greeted her, to an outsider their hugs and easy intimacy gave the appearance of a big sister, little brother reunion. Beverly followed Chilton up the stairs into the Sanctuary with Will three steps behind and when they finally reached Will's former bedroom, seeing what welcomed her made her gasp.

"Oh my God."

"Welcome." Frederick's arm made a broad sweep of the room.

On one side of the room Price and Gideon sat on the bed, on the opposite side stood two large freestanding murder boards decorated with photos and documents. Steered by Frederick, Beverly walked to the boards and began inspecting the paperwork.

"Where did you get all this information?" Beverly shot Will a look.

"TattleCrime." The Omega answered with a half truth."

"Some of these are marked confidential. These reports are from Europol and other European police forces. Okay, even Lounds wouldn't risk pissing off so many authorities at once." Bev protested.

"When I was incarcerated at the BSHCI I discovered psychopaths were one of the most boring sectors to share a facility with. Their conversations tended to be limited, who they killed, how they killed, who they intended to kill next. Very samey. However one of my fellow guests had a very interesting legal representative, a rather chatty man who regaled me with details of a former client, someone expertly skilled at gaining access to information stored on a computer." Abel declared.

"A hacker." Beverly stated.

"One man's hacker is another man's gateway to the truth. After my release I made contact with said gentleman and it has proved to be a very fruitful association."

"You've hacked Europol." Beverly spat out.

"I merely toured their archives." Abel countered.

"Look at this." Will said excitedly pointing to the pictures pinned to the board. "Budge boasted his finest work was in Leipzig, Lyon, Milan and Baltimore. We searched his social media postings. This photo dated and time stamped was taken of Budge in the Riverside Forest, Leipzig. A couple of days later the mutilated body of a street musician was found at the exact spot. Six months later there's a photo of Budge by the Naviglio Grande in Milan, two days later a body is discovered near the same spot. The corpse had the neck of a violin rammed down it's throat. Five months later there's a picture of Budge outside a café in Lyon. Three days later the owner was found inside the premises, investigators said it looked as if the killer had tried to turn her into a lyre. Europol suspected the killings were committed by the same man."

"He's practically taking selfies with them." Jimmy sneered.

"These cases are over five years old, Will. If Tobias Budge is a serial killer why the long gap between Lyon and Baltimore?"

"When he returned to the States four years ago he was the victim of a hit and run." Will replied.

"Multiple hits and run." Jimmy corrected. "He was repeatedly ran over him. My mother used to say if you first don't succeed then try, try again. Obviously the would be murderer was familiar with the saying. It was eighteen months before Budge could walk unaided."

"Okay, so what's the motive for Wilson and Walsh?" Beverly asked.

"I am a member of the Baltimore musical appreciation society and rumour has it Douglas Wilson was a very difficult man, prone to ridiculing the talents of fellow musicians. It is not too much of a stretch, having met Mr Budge, to believe he would not take kindly to criticism." Frederick straightened his back.

"You've met him? That wasn't part of the plan." Will cried out. "If you went to meet him with an agenda, Budge would see right through it."

"Werner and Barbara Komeda always invite me to their soirees. It just so happened Mr Budge was there. Besides, I didn't go alone, I took back up."

"I was his plus one." Abel waved a hand.

"Yes." Frederick hissed. "And you had to go and tell everyone about your time at the BSHCI, didn't you?"

"Due to miscommunication they believed I was the administrator of said hospital and I felt obliged to correct the error." Abel smiled

"Agent Katz, Tobias Budge is not the kind of man you trifle with." Frederick said solemnly.

Jimmy leant forward and whispered. "What he really means is Budge scared the socks off him."

"He just kept staring at me with those creepy eyes." Frederick shuddered.

"Great." Beverly snapped. "I'll apply for a search warrant on the grounds the suspect is in possession of creepy eyes."

"Abel?" Will felt things slipping away.

"I am not a psychiatrist but having listened to Mr Budge, I would say his is full of himself. He is narcissistic and grandiose, claiming credit for the accomplishments of Senator Froidevaux and clearly has a bone to pick with those he considers hostile to his ideas. Namely the members of the establishment who have declined to increase the budget of his project."

"I'm not saying he isn't a murderer but if I'm going to take this Jack....." Beverly tailed off at the sight of the young Omega's crestfallen face.

"Surely." Frederick stepped forward. "If you explained to Agent Crawford about the amount of effort we all have put into this investigation, it might help."

"You want me to tell Jack of your involvement." Beverly scoffed. "You're all crazy."

Jimmy held up his arm. "Technically, I'm the only one who is crazy. It says so on my discharge from duty certificate from the FBI. I believe the exact words were emotionally unstable."

"I would contend emotional instability is not crazy." Abel said glancing at his neighbour on the bed.

"Ah, but emotional instability coupled with body snatching could tip the balance." Jimmy nodded sage like.

Beverly struggled to stay calm. "Jack Crawford would laugh me out of his office and then bawl me out for days if I told him Jimmy Price was investigating his case."

"Bev." Will tapped the board. "Jack always said he had a problem with the concept of coincidence. This isn't a coincidence. Go to Jack and tell him everything. At the very least he could eyeball Budge."

"If Budge threatened to kill you then Jack would act." Beverly stared directly into Will's eyes. "Did Budge threaten to kill you?"

Will's gaze didn't falter. "He'd devised a whole different plan for me and told me if I didn't stay pure I'll die. So yeah, now I'm pregnant, he'll make good his word."

"I'll call Jack and tell him to look at Budge. Officially. No one is hurting you, kiddo, not with me around. For what it's worth, about Budge, I think you're right."

When Will had mentioned he had been feeling constantly tired throughout the day and a dizzy spell made him cling to her for support, Bedelia had insisted he contact Tocca. A simple blood test has confirmed anaemia and although the Omega was normally reluctant to ingest anything not organically sourced, he agreed he needed more than nature could supply. With Hannibal filling the prescription and deciding to leave the office early, Donald's call informing her the special delivery had arrived came at an opportune moment. Calling her son, she cheerfully related the news.

"Is Uncle absolutely sure it belonged to Isabella Graham?" Hannibal inquired.

"He is positive. Jack Crawford inspected the collar and confirmed it was the one Will was wearing when they rescued him. It apparently had been secured from the doctor who had taken it from Will. For some unfathomable reason those in charge were advised if Will continued to wear the collar then the doctor's assessment Will was suffering from Stockholm Syndrome would gain merit. It was stored as evidence and somehow overlooked."

"This stays between you and I until I talk to Will."

"Hannibal, I will not say a word. When you asked Donald to look into this matter, I totally agreed Will's hopes shouldn't be raised and we would keep quiet. You should be the one who tells him the good news."

"I will contact Uncle to say I am on my way. And mother, I want to thank you for your support, for caring for Will and for your understanding."

Bedelia laughed softly. "Hannibal, you have no need to thank me, I do it because I love you."

Hannibal visualised his mother's smile. "In future I will skip the thanks and just say, I love you, mother, it will be quicker."

Making the quick call and picking up the tablets, Hannibal made his way into the outer office, saying goodbye to his secretary he had only had taken a few steps when she called after him.

"Is that you humming?"

Hannibal hesitated. "Possibly?"

"You've ditched the sourpuss look." Ardelia always shot straight from the hip. "Marriage suits you. You seem, now what's that word I would seldom use to describe you, oh yes, happy?"

Hannibal rewarded her with a grin. "I am."

Harland Tier stretched out his legs as he sat back in the chair. A tall, broad man, his hair had no sign of grey and Donald often mused whether it had been treated to make him more appealing to the younger voters.

"Robert contacted me to say young Will Graham wanted to sell the land rights in Lithuania at market value. Seems the kid felt bad about the Tiers losing out. Stopped at DuMaurier House to sign the paperwork and there's the Omega with Robert by his side like some geriatric eagle protecting it's young. I've seen some sweethearts in my time, but he's a real beauty. Almost angelic."

Head down, Donald continued making amendments to the speech. "Never thought Robert as attractive. Perhaps you should tell him how you feel."

Harland's thunderous laugh echoed through the hallway. "Robert's way too scraggy for my taste. I could kick Randall's ass all the way to Seattle and back. If he had been more of a man that Omega could have been carrying my grandchild. Hell, If I had been twenty years younger and single, I'd have fought an army of Alphas to claim him."

"Add another two decades and you may have been age appropriate." Donald had found Harland's exuberance welcoming, a change from those who treated him with too much deference which he often suspected bordered on condescension .

"Hannibal's a dark horse, never seemed the Omega type. Good for the kid though, an Omega like that needs a strong mate to keep the wolves from the door. Hell, even I wouldn't cross swords with that nephew of yours. He once shook my hand so hard I had to go to ER to make sure no bones were broken And that was his friendly grip."

"They're well matched. Will may be quiet but he has a spark of individuality that will keep Hannibal on his toes and Hannibal isn't all Hollywood, he has an introspective side."

Matthew's knock on the open door didn't surprise Donald. He could have called from the doorway but the young Beta was respectful and compliant with the rules, even when Donald relaxed them, Matthew had stuck with the old regime.

"Excuse me, Mr President, I'm going to take my break. Miss Kade and Miss Gretchen have decided to take their tea and fancies to the upstairs sitting room."

"Smoke break?" Donald had considered extending the smoking ban which applied to the inside of Sutcliffe House to the outside rounds but faced with a mutiny from the gardening crew he had backed down.

"Sorry, Mr President, I do listen to your advice, sir."

"Remember Matthew, next time you light a cigarette, smoking kills." Donald's voice rippled with concern. "If you see my nephew, tell him we're in my office."

"Keep walking."

Initially he had laughed thinking it was a joke when Tobias had guided him away from the car and into the woods.

"I think you might find it difficult to get to Donald from here." Franklyn said his mind wandering through a maze of confusion. "When you said you wanted to see him, I thought, okay, ring him, make an appointment, the usual routine."

"Keep walking."

They retraced the path from the lodge to the boundary between estates. Franklyn bemused watched as Tobias brushed the leaves and loose earth away from the rusted broken bottom of the link chain fence.

"You dug a hole?"

"Crawl under."

"No, no, no, Tobias, this joke has gone a little too far." His words died as did his rational thinking when his friend showed him the gun tucked into his belt.

"Crawl under."

Franklyn shuddered when he glanced at Tobias and saw insanity in his eyes. He struggled crawling belly down, his sweater snagged on the wires and before he managed to stand, Tobias had slithered under and was towering over him.

"Why are you doing this?" Franklyn cried out.

"It's my destiny." Tobias had purred before resuming his mechanical tone . "Get up and keep walking."

The agent, unsuspecting walked up to them when they were halfway through the woods.

"Senator Froideveaux? Are you expected?" Forgetting his training by focusing on the man familiar to him, he was too slow to react as, the gun which had been placed to his head at lightning speed, popped. A plume of red gushed from his skull and as he fell, Franklyn instinctively tried to catch hold of him. With mouth wide open, one look at the twisted smile on Budge's face told him everything he needed to know and without any verbal instruction he continued to walk towards Sutcliffe House.

The second agent coming towards them was easier to distract. Pointing to the dense wooded area behind them, Tobias called out.

"Officer, there's a man injured, he's fallen. He's one of yours."

As the man rushed by, Tobias pulled out the hunting knife and grabbing the man around the face, cut deep into his throat. Franklyn deliberately avoided witnessing the event but couldn't shut out the sound of someone screaming as if underwater followed by a gurgling sound. Pushed forward he walked across the lawn towards the front of the house and as he saw the parked car, was overwhelmed by the urge to shout a warning. He saw three men, one seated in the vehicle, one standing talking to a third, who, side on to the Senator, was drawing on a cigarette and as Budge fired, the three fell. With his heart pounding in his chest, Franklyn finally accepted there was no escape and he was a dead man walking.

All of Donald's senses warned him something was wrong as the pair entered the room. "Franklyn, I wasn't expecting you? Security didn't say you had arrived?"

"You sent Hacker and Walsh to surprise me, now I've surprised you." Tobias huffed out.

"What's going on, Frankie?" Donald asked his former school buddy.

"You are the instrument to my becoming when I will be worshipped under the bright light of fame." Tobias with eyes wide levelled the gun and as he squeezed, Sutcliffe found himself barged out of the line of fire by Harland who claimed the bullet.

"He's insane." Franklyn screamed as he rushed forward, pulling the gun so it's muzzle went into his frame, his body jolted each time the last of shots spat out.

Donald's finger hit the panic button under his desk, then scuttling around it's edge grabbed Budge at the shoulders, pushing him back into the hallway. Proud to state during the election he had never resorted to fighting preferring reason over fists, now fighting for his life Donald discovered he regretted not learning how to throw a punch. They stumbled backward until Donald felt the first blow to his right side which he managed to brush off but when the second landed and the excruciating pain made him cry out he realised he had lost the battle. Looking down he saw his bloody shirt but it was only after he saw the knife in the left hand of Budge did it register he had been stabbed. As he slid from his assailant's hold onto the floor, his professional training took over and he began to calculate how long it would take before he bled out.

Even with a new agent on the gate, Hannibal had been granted entrance relatively easily. Armed with necessary identification, it had been his television appearances by which the agent had recognised him, congratulating him on his designs. Parking his car in the allocated space, he had walked casually along the path until the figure doubled over near the house caught his attention so he quickened his pace. He could see it was Matthew, one arm wrapped around his waist, the other pointing towards the door.

"The President." he gasped.

Hannibal barrelled into the house, seeing his uncle laying on the floor and Budge standing over him brandishing a knife, he launched himself at the other Alpha. Hannibal caught the man's left arm and pulling it in a downward motion, smashed his left fist into the mouth of Budge, repeating the action twice more before Budge slipped out of his grasp. Hannibal landed a powerful blow to the Alpha's face before grabbing the hand holding the knife yet again and as they staggered to the stair rail, Hannibal clutched at the Alpha's throat and began

to squeeze. With his back against the rail and feet sliding on the tiled floor, Tobias reached into his pocket and taking out a small folding knife, flicked it open and rammed it into Hannibal's thigh before twisting.

Hannibal cried out and in a fraction of a second released his hold on the throat and punched the arm away leaving the knife embedded up to the hilt in his leg. Searching blindly he captured a wrist and now holding both arms rendered his enemy powerless. Almost face to face Budge snarled.

"I'm going to cut the Omega bitch's belly wide open before I cut it's throat."

The winner now decided by who could last the longest, as the seconds ticked away, Hannibal felt Budge leaning sideways, forcing him onto his damaged leg. He could hear the shouting, a woman's yells coming closer but was unwilling to let down his guard by averting his gaze. His peripheral vision caught sight of a heel of a shoe beating down on the other Alpha's face. Kade Sutcliffe wielded her shoe like an axe and although the blows were weak, when the eyes were targeted Budge had no option other than to turn his head away.

With his strength ebbing, Hannibal took his last shot and freeing both hands hammered the head of Budge with both fists. Hannibal's final swing cracked the man's jaw and Budge toppled sideways onto the floor. Sidling like a crab he crawled across the room until satisfied he was out of their reach. He pushed himself upright, shoulders straight, blood pouring from his mouth, he took a deep breath and managed one purposeful step towards Hannibal and Kade before two bullets slammed into his body and a third into his head.

Budge dropped to the ground and Hannibal, leaning into the rail for support, heard the question but didn't reply until the floor beneath Tobias Budge was coloured dark red.

"Is he dead?"

Turning gradually, still panting, Hannibal couldn't answer Matthew with words, so nodded his head. Hannibal watched as the Beta lowered his weapon and using the side table to steady himself eased down onto the floor and with his back pressed against it, he left a trail of blood on the wall.

"I need a chair, grandmother." Hannibal whispered to Kade still standing the other side of the rail.

The loud voices of the kitchen staff, now out of hiding, rushing to their aid competed with the sirens of the emergency vehicles racing towards the house. The two elderly Omega sisters gently eased him onto the cushioned seat of the chair and it was only then Hannibal could fully comprehend the level of violence Tobias Budge had inflicted that day. Those deemed critical were the first to be transferred to the ambulances and during a short spell of quiet, Hannibal reached into his jacket pocket and took out his cell.

Walt Foster stood at the door wearing an expression Bedelia had never seen on him before and one she had difficulty placing. It was as he spoke she realised she was viewing shock.

"Has someone told you?" With no response and a look of confusion on her face, Walt continued. "The road to Baltimore is blocked, police, medics, they're saying the President has been hurt."

Bedelia stood dumbfounded, her mouth open, she found she couldn't respond.

"It will be all over the news."

She turned at his words and walked steadily to the sitting room while Walt followed her into the house and closing the door behind him. The television sprang into life and even with the sound muted the caption running across the bottom of the screen gave her all the information she required.

"An assassination attempt?" She looked at Foster in disbelief.

"Don't know any of the details but that's what people are saying. The press will be soon hounding you so it's best if you close the gates."

Bedelia moved automatically to the control panel in the hall, pressing the button she didn't hear the ring tone on her cell until Foster alerted her, the house phone now ringing she dithered until Walt acted.

"I'll answer that." he said moving toward the hall table while she rummaged through her purse.

Robert's voice though concise was occasionally weakened by emotion as he gave her the back story then fielded her questions. "They have been taken to Johns Hopkins. No, no my dear, they say Hannibal's injuries are not life threatening. They are operating on Donald at this moment. No, not shot, they were stabbed. Harland Tier and several agents are hurt. No, no your mother is fine but she wouldn't leave Donald's side so she came with him. No, um, everything is being relayed in fragments. Baltimore police department have sent a car for you so I will see you soon. Yes, perhaps if Will comes too it will be for the best. I have to go, I'll call you later. I love you, darling."

She hated having to wake the boy, as he looked peaceful lying on his bed, head angled to one side. She touched his arm, calling his name until eyelids fluttered open. Bleary eyed he looked at her and at her command sat up acknowledging his was fully awake. She told him the events, keeping her voice soft and calm, concealing the well warranted hatred she felt for the monster who had attacked her loved ones. He followed her instructions, once dressed to both their satisfaction, they waited down stairs for their ride.

"Will, the press will be out in force. They will be hoping for pathos, the tears and the sobbing. You have to stay in control."

The world was flowing in on him. The car journey was made in silence and his mind drifted away to the stream until exiting the car in a secure area. The shouts from the press standing to the far side of the parking lot jolted him back to the now and Will's defensive Omegan mode compelled him to duck his head. Ushered along by agents, he eventually found himself seated alongside Bedelia in the hospital administrator's office. A tall imposing man, a doctor Will guessed, entered the room wearing a grim and sombre expression, taking Bedelia aside. When one of the agents standing near asked if he was okay, Will managed, even through stuttering speech, to fake a positive response.

"Things will be fine, Will, honey, I promise."

Her voice echoed in his inner ear and although common sense told him his mother wasn't there, he still looked around the room searching for her. They came into the room in bursts. Kade with Alana, her one woman support group then Zeller, quietly competent, translating medical updates in layman's terms. Their body language fascinated Will, giving each other space, they moved around the room finding an item to busy them before reassuring each other with words. Unlike Omegas who would fall upon each other for comfort, the Alphas gained strength by standing alone. Even Kade mimicked them, years of living with an elite Alpha pack having rubbed off. Robert, the last to arrive, stood in front of his wife and by a look or a nod of the head, he used a form of communication evolved from years of devoted companionship. As the pieces came together when they talked about the events of the day, Will's world became heavier and darker. Franklyn dead, Brown, Tier shot, agents dead or hanging on to life by the slimmest of threads. The blame game Will was playing in his mind ended with him being crowned the prime suspect.

It was the domino effect. The news Hannibal had been moved to recovery had lightened the gloom, then Harland Tier's attempts to be discharged from hospital, insisting a flesh would wouldn't keep him from his job, had entertained Robert.

"Harland has to compete. I would not be surprised if Senator Hercules Tier announced part of his convalescence will include climbing Mount Everest." Robert said recovering his pithy humour. "Naked."

Accepting the offer of exclusive use of the hospitality suite on Kade's behalf, confident Alana could manage the elderly Omega on her own, Bedelia explained to the administrator.

"My Omega son-in-law is pregnant and it is best if he sleeps in a familiar setting surrounded by his family which is why my husband and I will be staying with him."

Bedelia publicly describing herself as Will's family hit home and for the first time since she had woken him, he blinked away the tears. Crawford's arrival asking Bedelia for permission to interview Kade then inquiring of the elderly Omega whether she was able to recollect the traumatic events was met with a fiesty response.

"Of course I can." Kade's fighting spirit rose to the occasion. "Because I'm old it doesn't mean my brain is addled, sonny."

The constant stream of activity was whirling around his head and seeking isolation, Will took advantage of the hospitality suite with the excuse of wanting to freshen up. Deciding to walk off some of the tension, Will was halfway down a corridor when he recognised the figure standing in front of the doorway. He sped up and was almost on top of the man when he spoke.

"Frederick?"

Frederick hardly moved as he answered, just a faint flick of his hand towards the room. "Matthew."

Will felt the ground move and he shifted to keep his balance as his mind apportioned blame to the one person he held responsible for the carnage. *"You were too fucking late, Graham."*

"I should've acted sooner."

"It is not your fault, Will. The only person to blame is Tobias Budge." Frederick gave a quick shake of the head as if bringing himself back to reality. "I heard the news from one of the security guards, his cousin works at Sutcliffe House. Abel insisted on accompanying me. He's wandered off to try and find refreshments, hopefully coffee."

"Matthew's family, are they here?"

"I spoke to his mother when she called the hospital, she and her husband are on their way. She was so appreciative when she discovered Matthew's friends were already present. Didn't like the thought of Matthew being on his own." Frederick gave a little laugh. "Apparently he has spoken about us quite often, she said she has built up a mental picture of each of us."

"He's gonna be okay, isn't he?" Will's voice quivered.

"He was shot twice. I'm not going to lie to you, Will and give you false promises. It's very serious but we must not lose hope. The Lecters, they are with you?"

"Yeah, even Valdas is on route."

"There is nothing like grief and trauma to pull people together."

Will reached out tentatively and was thankful when Frederick grasped his hand and squeezed. Will heard the voices and glanced to his right to see Abel, a styrofoam cup in each hand with Zeller beside him. Zeller's face carried his concern openly and Will froze expecting the worse.

"Been looking for you. Hannibal's out of recovery. You can see him now." Zeller beckoned and Will followed ducking his head, not wishing to look at the damaged Matthew, afraid more tragedy added to the mountain of disconsolation perched on his shoulders would make his legs buckle. As they turned the corner, the noise which had been dogging Will's heels since he entered the hospital returned with a vengeance. Will spotted who he guessed to be an agent standing with his back to the wall and as Zeller entered the room the man was guarding, an arm reached across the doorway blocking Will's path.

"Family only." Will halted, looking forlornly into the room where Robert stood one side of the bed, hands clasped behind his back and Bedelia the other, talking in hushed tones to her son.

"Let him through." Exhaustion hampered Robert's voice as he attempted to emphasise each word. **"The boy is family."**

The guard muttered a sorry permitting Will to enter and the closer Will got to his Alpha the whimpering became stronger as did the compulsion to run away. On hearing the sounds Bedelia's attention shifted from her son to the Omega, recognising the symptoms of delayed distress disorder, signifying the possible onset of shock. She was proud of the boy, when surrounded by strangers he had played his part by weathering the crisis extremely well but now cushioned by family, he had lowered his defences and was gently falling apart. Stepping back from Hannibal, she insisted Will sit on the bed, be the one closest to his Alpha, a position rightfully his.

Witnessing the Omega's despair, Hannibal pulled Will down until the boy's head rested next to his, gently stroking the boy's cheek with his thumb. With the Omega's nose touching his neck breathing in the faint scent of the Alpha, Hannibal felt strangely empowered knowing he and he alone, without words of comfort, could calm the boy. There was of bizarre satisfaction watching Will, the little fighter, unashamedly declare his total dependency on his Alpha.

"I am fine, Will, good." Hannibal said once the Omega's breathing appeared to regulate and the weak whimpering had stopped. "The doctors have informed me, all being well, I will be discharged in a few days. One thing which would make me heal faster is seeing you smile."

Will pushed upright and attempted to fulfil Hannibal's request, the corners of his mouth twitched into a semblance of a smile as he looked lovingly at his Alpha. Hannibal's pallor was wan, his skin cool to the touch but the rich brown eyes were bright and alert.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to lose it just now." Will said, his voice hoarse from the whimpers.

"Mr Lecter." Jack's voice filled the room as he gave Robert a nod before turning to Bedelia. "Mrs Lecter. The President has been moved to recovery. The doctors say his condition is stable. It's looking good."

"Thank God." Robert sighed.

"Thank God and your son. If he hadn't been present, this story may have had a different ending."

"Was my mother's statement satisfactory? She can get confused." Bedelia asked.

"Very clear and very impressive. She showed great courage. In fact the Director is considering making her an honorary FBI agent." Jack smiled.

"Please don't." Robert grimaced. "She will have me deported."

Jack scrutinised Robert's expression and couldn't decide if his remarks were meant as a joke.

"Have you found Hatcher?" Will had eased off the bed and looked directly at Crawford, his hand folded across his stomach instinctively.

"Evidence at the Senator's house suggest Mr Hatcher is dead."

"I'm sorry, Jack, maybe if I'd acted sooner." Jack took in the Omega's appearance, face haggard and drawn, he looked worse than the Alpha laying on the bed.

"It's not your fault, Will." Jack maintained eye contact with the Omega, past experience had taught him how adept Will was in catching a lie. "Budge laid a blame path straight to Froidevaux. Even if we had started sooner, we'd have spent valuable time looking at the wrong man."

"I knew he was dangerous."

"You thought he was going to kill **you.**"

"You were in communication with the FBI." Robert's sharp tone was infused with incredulity.

"Will spoke to Beverly Katz, one of my agents. She was on the team who rescued Will. They became friends. Will had concerns regarding Budge so passed the information on. He did what any law abiding citizen would do in those circumstances." Jack covered for Will with ease. "If you will excuse me, I have to get back to work. As I was passing, I thought you would like the news about the President."

Jack stepped back and nodded a farewell to the group then left.

The journey back to Chandler Square was made in silence, the decision to stay in Baltimore belonged to Robert alone.

"It's near to the hospital. Just in case." Was all Robert said when he made the announcement but they all understood and agreed with his reasoning.

Bedelia had been allowed to visit Donald briefly and although her brother was drugged into oblivion, she was positive his fingers had tapped a response as she held his hand. She had tried to encourage Will to eat, reminding him he had to consider more than his own well being but with exception of a bowl of cereal, he couldn't fact the prospect of food. Robert was quieter than normal, at times deep in thought and Will was plagued by a gut feeling, prompted by the few occasions they had conversed, that his relationship with his father-in-law was off-kilter.

Will lay on the bed, fully dressed, the room lit by the glimmer of the sidelight and his imagination conjured up images of Sutcliffe House and the events of the day based on the

little information he had gathered. He heard the voice beside him and turning saw Budge sitting on the edge of the bed, pulling out a section of brain from the gaping hole in his forehead and offering it to the Omega.

"You killed me." Budge said staring down on Will. The panic was automatic, screaming, rolling out of the bed onto the floor and scrambling upright was a seamless set of unconscious actions. Racing across the room then frantically grabbing at the handle, the door opened and Will found himself pushing against Zeller as he tried desperately to leave the room.

"What's wrong?" Zeller grabbed hold of the Omega by the arms.

"He's here." Will yelled.

Switching on the light there was silence before Zeller said. "You're alone, Will. There is no one here."

Will preferred the couch rather than return to the bedroom. Grabbing a blanket and pillow, Zeller made sure the Omega was comfortable before choosing an armchair in which to spend the rest of the night.

"You don't have to stay with me." Will yawned. "I feel bad enough I woke you without you playing nursemaid."

"I was awake. Couldn't sleep." Zeller replied. "Remembering those times I ignored Franklyn at Donald's parties. Now he's dead, I'm regretting it. Fuck Budge, wish I could shoot that bastard for making me feel so guilty."

"You could go visit him down at the morgue. Stab him a few times, if you're that fired up." Will almost sung.

"Maybe we should go together. The way you were yelling, could tell you really thought Budge was alive."

As tiredness pressed down on him, Will could not be troubled to keep up his usual guard. "The price of imagination. Comes with the dual empathy. I get so far into someone else's head it's difficult to tell what is real. I end up in a twisted reality until everything comes crashing down. The trick is not bringing something back with you when you try to get your head straight. Think I've kinda lost my touch."

Zeller closed his eyes. "Hell, I just about get Omegan empathy so there's now way I'm going to understand what you do."

"The truth is, when all is said and done, there are days when even I don't get what I do." Will yawned again and gave up resisting sleep.

Robert hadn't intended to eavesdrop. Hunger had taken hold and he had decided to appease it with milk and cookies but when he heard the voices as he reached the bottom of the stairs, he lingered. Will's description of his ability had aligned with the explanation the dual, who

Robert had known in his younger days in Lithuania, had given him. The Omega had lived in isolation by choice, unable to cease empathising with those around him and when life became too unbearable, had chosen death. As emotions impacted on the clearness of his logical thinking, Robert stepped back into his childhood and prayed for guidance. The two Omegas may have been cut from the same cloth but Robert was determined Will would not be fated with the same end.

"It's noon." Robert stated as the Omega made his way into the kitchen seduced by the aroma of coffee.

"Why didn't someone wake me?"

"Because, young man, you looked exhausted and in need of rest."

Will took a cup and began to fill it, hesitating when he saw the quizzical look on Robert's face. "Doctor Tocca doesn't believe in total abstention. One cup of coffee a day, two small glasses of wine a week is okay. Eating healthily everyday and attending regular medical checks should be my priorities. Oh and avoiding stress. Two out of three isn't bad seeing how I have no control over the third."

"My beloved wife called earlier. Hannibal is well. She couldn't stay away from the hospital. I could only have kept her here if I tied her to a chair but I do not think I would have succeeded. She fights dirty."

As Will sipped the coffee he looked at Robert, taking in every detail. The Alpha physically didn't see much affected by the trauma but there was something about the way his jaw was set which indicated tension.

"I'm sorry." Will said

"I'm unaware that you have anything to be sorry for, William."

"I'm sorry about contacting the FBI without speaking to you first. I saw the way you looked when Jack told you what I'd done."

"I was surprised you hadn't felt inclined to discuss the matter with me and concerned that you may have attempted to fight an enemy single-handedly."

"I wasn't alone." Will blurted out. "I went to Frederick. Then Abel and Jimmy got involved. I wasn't planning to confront Budge, just develop a profile which would convince Jack to take a long hard look at him."

"But you chose to by-pass the head of the family whose roof you live under." The absence of anger in Robert's voice made Will feel ashamed, knowing he had show a lack of trust in the Alpha standing in front of him.

"If I had told you that Budge had threatened me, planned to rape and breed me, would you have told Hannibal?" Will found himself blushing as he said the words.

"Yes." Robert replied

"What would Hannibal have done?" Will already knew the answer and hoped Robert will draw the same conclusion.

Robert spoke slowly as he imagined the scenario. "Hannibal would have sought out Budge, challenged him and from what we now know about his methods, Budge would have apologised abjectly, would even let Hannibal rough him up, as they say. Budge would have then bided his time and when least expected and in a cowardly fashion struck. My son, most likely, would be dead."

"That's why I kept quiet."

Robert allowed the silence hang in the air, absorbing then accepting the Omega's actions . "I warned Donald on several occasions about his security detail. Donald has always been a man of the people, not one to build a wall between himself and the public he serves. I blame myself for not being more forcible with him but then none of us could have envisaged one as deadly as Budge was already so close to the President. He was hiding in plain sight and none, except you, could see him."

"I got blindsided, could only see the danger to me."

Robert picked up his coffee and drank. "And your child. Had you come to me about Budge, I would have, in all probability, believed your pregnancy was affecting your judgement and would have focused on allaying your fears instead of acting on your words. We both seek to take responsibility for the actions of Tobias Budge when, in fact, it is he who is solely to blame. Disaster has a way of putting things into perspective. We cannot always go through life as bystanders, at some point, to prove our moral worth, we have to act. Which is why I am imploring you, William, if you sense danger and for some reason are unable to approach Hannibal you must approach me."

"Approach you and Frederick." Will stated

"Approach me and Frederick." Robert smiled. "And then the rest of the team."

The arrival of Valdas earned a shout from Robert when he saw his eldest son being escorted into the house by an agent. Will watched with his back against the kitchen counter as they hugged, chattering in their native tongue. Then turning his attention to Will, Valdas gave the Omega a warm smile before he pulled him close and gently patted his back.

"He'll be fine, little brother." Valdas spoke with enthusiasm. "We Lecters are tough. He'll soon be chasing the nurses around the room."

Will gave a scowl which made Valdas laugh out loud and as he ruffled Will's hair, he said. "Now I have given you something real to worry about."

Sandwiched between the two Lecters when they left the house, during the short car journey and walking along the hospital corridor, the message was clear. With Robert left of him and Valdas right, no one could have any doubts by the way they presented themselves, that the Omega in the middle was under the care of two important Alphas. Will wasn't surprised when the pangs of pure obedience rose to surface. Individually their scents were distinguishable but close together the striking undertones of the Alphas were stronger, reminding Will of Hannibal. Keeping his head and his mouth shut unless answering a question, Will was happy to hand over control and concentrate on putting on a brave face.

Hannibal's smile when he saw Valdas made Will's heart melt. The expression on his Alpha's face when he and his brother clasped hands as Valdas sat on the bed was one Will had never seen before. It mirrored the look Robert wore when Valdas arrived at Chandler Square, a mixture of joy and relief. There was a closeness Will observed in the Lecter men, not deliberately excluding the others, but when reunited and recounting their shared history, some conversations revolved exclusively around the adventures of the father and his sons. Will didn't mind taking a step back, he was the outsider and accepted families communicated covertly even by a simple hug but he couldn't prevent the ache returning as the past resurfaced and he thought of the ones he had lost.

"They are discharging me the day after tomorrow." Hannibal held Will's hand and the Omega managed a smile. He couldn't tell if they were aware inside he was sinking fast but the firmness in Hannibal's grasp told him it showed.

Will excused himself on returning to the house, despite Bedelia's protestations that he hadn't eating nearly enough and headed to the bedroom where he lay on the bed softly crying as sleep escaped him, feeling the walls were closing in fast. Head under the covers, Will tried to ignore the death rattle as Tobias Budge, lying next to him, breathed his last.

"You worry too much, Will." Valdas called out as he closed the bedroom door behind him. Will peered above the sheet as his brother-in-law casually walked across the room, like Will, still dressed in his day clothes.

"I like to wallow in self pity alone." Will said hoping the Alpha would take the hint.

"It is your condition. The doctors should have warned you that you'll be very sensitive. Pregnant Omegas feel vulnerable and need their mate to feel safe." Valdas kicked off his shoes and sat on the bed, rearranging the pillows so he could lean against the headboard in comfort.

"I feel like I'm hollowed out." Will confided, hoping he didn't receive a grocery list of platitudes for his candour.

"You are surrounded by Alphas and you are trying to mould your behaviour in a way you believe we will find acceptable. You have to stay true to your own character, none of us

expect you to stay strong. We may be able to hide our emotions but we do not expect you to do the same."

"You'd prefer it if I broke down and cried three or four times a day. I think you'd find me pathetic after a while."

"I would rather see you cry and be able to comfort you rather than you push us away by withdrawing from us."

"Is that what you think I'm doing?" Will cried out, shocked by the suggestion.

"I believe you played the role of the tough little Omega the best you could but now you have drained all the life out of that battery, everything is shutting down. I like honesty, Will, it has a cleansing effect. I'd gladly help if you told me you needed someone to watch over you while you sleep because you were afraid or were feeling sorry for yourself and needed to be held."

"Yeah, well maybe I am feeling sorry for myself cause I'm too afraid to go to sleep. Maybe I want to curl up into a ball and hide in a closet somewhere till someone tells me all the bad stuff is over. Maybe I want someone to tell me that Hannibal and I will live happily ever after for a while."

"The bad stuff is over, Will. Everyone is recovering. Senator Tier left hospital tonight and Hannibal will be coming home soon and I will watch over you while you sleep. The happily ever after is down to you and Hannibal."

Will lay still, dissecting the Alpha's words, kicking himself for trying to act in a way which was contrary to his nature.

"Thanks, Valdas, thanks for looking out for me and for caring."

"Hey, that's okay, little Omega, that's what big brothers do."

Seated in the chair Hannibal felt less like a victim and more a victor. The doctor had warned of possible flashbacks, feelings of remorse or anxiety but when Hannibal envisioned Budge laying dead, he felt sinless. He opened the flask his father had brought with him that morning and poured the tea into the cup, brewed exactly to his liking, he relished the flavour as he drank. Used to the constant stream of visitors, his mother alternating between brother and son, he was caught off guard as he glanced up from his book to see Frederick hovering near the door.

"A good sign, you're out of bed. I, um, I was just passing and wondered if you needed anything?" The Beta said awkwardly as he walked into the room.

"No, I am good, thank you. I have everything I need." The wall of uncomfortable silence which stood between them persuaded Hannibal to make an effort for the sake of his Omega.

"My mother told me you are here for Agent Brown. Is he out of danger?"

"Yes, yes he seems to have turned the corner. Opened his eyes a few times trying to fight his way back to consciousness."

"That is good to hear."

Frederick struggled to find the words. "Hannibal, I am well aware I am an acquired taste and you and I may not be destined for friendship but I would like still to be part of Will's life. The point being....."

Hannibal interrupted. "The point being you will always be part of Will's life, Frederick, whether I care for it or not. You are special to Will and I would not have it any other way. You were assigned the role of Will's father and when our child is born I expect you take up the duties of a grandfather. Your recollections of the Graham family are of a positive nature which Will needs to be reminded of once in a while."

Frederick gave the Alpha a rare smile. "I am so relieved, hearing those words. I've tried to keep in the background in case I stepped on your toes."

"I have large feet, Frederick, I doubt very much I would notice if you occasionally trod on them."

"Well, now that the ice between us has broken." Frederick shifted uneasily as if afraid he was about to fracture their accord. "I've actually come here to ask you for a favour. Actually a very big favour. You have been informed Will and I investigated Budge?"

"My father was here a short while ago and explained the situation."

"Yes, I saw him in the corridor." Frederick paced a little before advancing on the Alpha. "This is very difficult for me, Hannibal but I want you to promise to do something for me, Well, rather it's more of a do not. Do not allow Will to join the FBI or for that matter, any law enforcement agency."

Hannibal took a breath, stunned by Frederick's request. "To say I am surprised would be an understatement. I thought you supported Will's ambition."

"I humoured Will once upon a time because Omegas were barred from working in law enforcement. Had I ever imagined the situation would change, then I would have steered Will onto another path, which is exactly what I am asking of you."

"Why the concern."

"Will's ability is still developing, in some respects he is still a child which makes him very susceptible to influence. Jack Crawford and his colleagues are fully aware of Will's potential and given a chance, they would draw him in. The FBI is the big boy's playground. They would use him and once they had broken him, toss him aside. The choice is yours. You either allow Will to walk into the danger zone or stop him. There are no halfway measures." As Frederick moved closer, Hannibal could clearly see the plea in the man's eyes.

"Frederick, I have encouraged Will to step out into the world. To aim further than the areas normally restricted to Omegas. To instruct him not to follow his chosen path would demonstrate the type of Alphan behaviour I have always abhorred."

"Andrew Graham gave all his children pet names. Marissa was gazelle because of her gracefulness, Georgia was lioness." Frederick chuckled. "You only had to meet Georgia once to see how apt that name was. Will was mongoose. Will has always thought the name was chosen because of his ability to read people, to see which ones were the snakes as they came closer to the house. He was wrong. The mongoose is resilient, it has an unique signature, it's capable of great acts of heroism especially when saving other members of their team. They will fight the most deadliest of enemies and despite being gravely wounded, will never give up even it is means their own death. That is how Andrew Graham saw his son which is why he was determined to find Will another dream to follow other than county sheriff. "

Hannibal's memory resurrected Holly's warning. *"He's still a baby, Hannibal, you'll have to protect him, he won't be able to avoid influence until he's much older."*

"I can assure you, Frederick, I will do everything in my power to keep Will safe. Even if it means, in this instance, I have to use my influence."

"Hannibal." Frederick spoke one last time before leaving. "Never underestimate the lure of the FBI. If they get their claws into Will, they will take him from you. You will lose him."

Will didn't object to visiting in the late afternoon, after Robert explained it would be less tiring for Hannibal if they staggered their visits. In the kitchen Will could hear Zeller and Valdas bickering over what and where to eat later and with Robert not yet back from the hospital, Will finally took some time out and caught up with the outside world. He pulled his phone from his jacket pocket and switched it on. Experience told Will the sudden burst of laughter from Zeller meant either Valdas had brought up an incident from their childhood or was guilty of mispronunciation. Will easily scrolled through, only having a few contacts meant fewer texts, the usual trash from his call provider took up most of his time. The voicemail was two days old and unexpected. As he placed the phone against his ear, the familiar accented voice began to speak.

" Will, I want you to stay calm. You will be told I have been hurt but it is a minor wound. Think of our son, Will, do not let panic take hold. I needed to tell you that I love you, Will, I love you with all my heart."

Chapter 38

"Shut the fuck up." Valdas snapped as he moved the wheelchair into position." All you do is moan, moan, moan."

"I can walk." Hannibal snarled at his older brother.

"No, Hannibal, you can't. What you do is hop, not walk. H O P hop. If you had listened to the doctors you'd have been home sooner, but no, not you, you fucking idiot. I can walk, you say, so you walk then you fall, then you have to stay in longer. Doctors orders, moron, patients listen to the doctors but not the great Hannibal Lecter. Oh no. Now shut the fuck up and swing across into the chair and maybe we'll get inside before nightfall." Valdas growled.

"Told you we should have left him at the bottom of the hill. Made him wheel himself home." Zeller declared grabbing a bag from the trunk.

"Next time, brother, I will listen to you." Valdas huffed as he pushed the Alpha laden wheelchair along the drive.

Zeller overtook them with a gentle sprint, the front door keys jangling in his hand. Will hanging back from the trio grinned wildly once they were ahead of him. The warning from Valdas had proved prophetic. Hannibal was the worst patient, anxious to be out and about, he had pushed the boundaries to their outer limits before they snapped back. Swinging the small toiletry bag which was the only effort his was allowed to contribute, Will purposely slowed until Valdas manoeuvred the chair through the doorway.

By the time Will had reached the sitting room, Valdas had managed to aid his brother onto the couch. Wheelchair pushed into a corner, Valdas slid the cane out of it's holder.

"No walking. Okay?" Valdas gave Hannibal the cane which he placed against the side of the couch. "Refreshments?"

"Darjeeling, green." Hannibal replied.

"Mrs Foster baked you a welcome home cake."

"Cake will be fine." Hannibal fought to keep his eyes open.

Will, standing facing his Alpha, was surprised as Valdas gentled him around and eased him down onto the couch next to the exhausted Hannibal. Grasping his brother by wrist and elbow, Valdas positioned the arm around the Omega's shoulders and when satisfied remarked. "That's better."

Left alone, Will tilted his head until it was angled towards the Alpha. Hannibal's palm soon found it's way against the Omega's cheek and the kiss that followed was comforting. Will broke off first, smiling shyly he ducked his head until the hand left his face and lifted his

chin, gently holding it in place as Hannibal's mouth sipped the Omega's lips. Content Hannibal pulled away, his eyes warm, he traced the Omega's jaw line with his thumb.

"I have missed you. Those nights in the hospital were empty."

"I wanted to stay with you, but was advised against it." Will's hand rubbed against the swell of his stomach. "You're not upset are you?"

"I needed you safe, both of you. I would not have permitted you to sleep there, no matter how much I may have desired it."

"Is there anything I can get you?" Will asked eagerly.

"You are all I need."

Robert meandered around the hospital corridors with his shadow, Agent Green. Green would answer his questions on security with informed knowledge but small talk was not his forte. With Green lacking on the humour side, Robert had tried to fine tune him with some little quips, some hit home but most were lost into the ether.

It was the voice which first captured his attention, the woman standing at the desk begging to see a doctor was strangely familiar. Drawing closer it was the strand of red hair poking out from her hat which clicked her into place. Sidling up to her, Robert listened to her whining, insisting she was heavily pregnant and needed to see a doctor. Glancing at her slender frame now bulging outward midway, Robert couldn't stifle the laugh.

"Miracle baby, Miss Lounds?" Robert inquired. "You appear to have made a rapid weight gain since I last saw you. Or are you about to be delivered of some fancy cushions strategically placed about your person."

Freddie stopped her protesting and flicked Robert a look out of the corner of her eye. "You can't blame a girl for trying, Mr Lecter."

He guided her away from the busy reception to a less active area. "All press releases are handled by the White House. I would suggest you try there if you require an update."

"They have kept us well informed but they're all very impersonal. No human interest, just the President is doing as well as expected."

"There's nothing here for you, Miss Lounds. The floor on which Donald Sutcliffe is roomed is swarming with security and I would suggest you do not try anything rash, for your own safety."

"My readers are hungry, Mr Lecter. Your family are news."

"You gave them plenty to satisfy their needs, Miss Lounds, with your lurid account of the death of Tobias Budge. As I recollect you implied it was Kade Sutcliffe who shot the attacker with her AK-47 assault rifle which presumably she kept under her pillow."

"I reported the facts, Mr Lecter, the former First Lady was involved in the fight."

"She hit Budge over the head with her shoe trying to help my injured son. It was Agent Brown who shot and killed Budge and it is he whose praises you should be singing."

Freddie shrugged. "That's been reported within an inch of it's life, presumably to keep your son and his Omega out of the limelight."

Robert stilled at the mention of his son-in-law. "My son could have been killed protecting his uncle. Most decent people have afforded him time to recover without pestering him for his version of events which will be revealed during the official inquiry."

"It's not your son I'm interested in." Freddie stated. "We both know the real story is Will Graham's abduction. If he gave an interview....."

"Good day, Miss Lounds." Robert turned quickly and made his way to an elevator.

"Ask Will what he ate to survive, Mr Lecter." Freddie called after him. "Or better still, ask him who he ate."

Valdas looked intently at Will's plate. As the Omega lifted his fork to his mouth, he changed his mind and turned on his brother-in-law.

"What?" Will grumbled "You keep staring at my dinner like a starved dog."

"Steamed fish and spinach. That's all you eat, Will."

"Plus Mrs Foster's delicious home made granary bread." Will smirked. "You're just jealous."

"Three days you eat the same."

"I keep craving it. Blame the baby."

"He got Walt Foster to sneak in donuts earlier." Zeller revealed.

"Et tu, Zeller." Will retorted. "Mrs Foster makes the best jelly donuts ever."

"Dad rang again." Zeller said finally remembering the thing he had forgotten earlier. "He says he'll be visiting tomorrow morning. Something about tidying up loose ends with you and Will."

Hannibal shook his head. "I cannot think of any business we have with father."

"Baby names. He could have thought of a few and wants your opinion." Valdas could tell by the look between Hannibal and Zeller he had spoken out of turn.

"What's wrong?" Will could sense the change of atmosphere in the room.

"It is our custom for the head of the family to choose the names for a male child. If we were to have a daughter, it would be your choice alone."

"Oh." The Omega said dolefully.

"Will, dad's a modern man. I'm sure he won't override any choices you've made." Zeller said trying to salvage the situation.

"No, I understand. I'm okay with it." Will lied.

"Dad also said Uncle Donald is due to be transferred to the White House at the weekend so he and mother will be returning home then."

"Donald is not going back to Sutcliffe House?" asked Valdas

"That helicopter buzzing the place. Surveyors. They're going to reinforce the whole estate. High tech fencing, extras guards, panic room, the lot. Donald wanted to be a man of the people but those days are over. With the death of two agents he gets no say on the matter." Zeller explained. "Even dad has to keep his designated driver. New rules brought in for those whose work allows them access to classified information. You can guess his reaction."

"Budge has changed everyone's lives." Hannibal eased back in his chair taking the strain off his leg. "I blundered in when I arrived at the house. I saw Agent Brown and did not stop to assess the situation. He had a gun, I could have taken it, used it on Budge. When I am recovered I will find a range to get reacquainted with my skills. Just in case."

"You shoot?" Will stopped eating and turned his face towards his Alpha.

"I learned to shoot in Lithuania. Our uncles always took Valdas and I with them during the hunting season." Hannibal said leisurely. "Does that make a difference to you?"

Will shook his head. "Just caught me off guard. I fish and eat what I catch so I guess it's the same principle."

Hannibal gave a knowing smile. "You have a life time to learn all about me, Will, I will never, purposely, keep anything hidden from you."

Hannibal's anger was simmering beneath the surface. "You believe Lounds is about to break the story."

Will stood against the far wall, looking anywhere other than at the two Alphas.

"It is my belief Freddie Lounds wants fame and monetary reward. I'm afraid, William," Robert swung his chair around to look at the Omega. "you are her meal ticket."

"Lucky me." Will spat out.

Hannibal glowered at the Omega and the moment Will raised his eyes and made contact, he realised his mistake. "I'm sorry, that was rude."

"I understand the strain you are under, William, but I am not your enemy." Robert soothed. "You have every reason to be hurt and upset having to relive a part of your life which causes you such misery."

"Where do you want to begin." Will asked hurriedly, wanting to escape the claustrophobic confines of Robert's office.

"I have the statement made by Miggs. It is important your accounts are similar, not identical otherwise they would appear fabricated, but enough matching details to bare scrutiny. I will ask a question and will judge whether your account tallies sufficiently with Miggs. Any portions which you and he disagree on will have to be adjusted."

"You want me to lie?"

"I would never ask you to blatantly lie, William. Perhaps it would feasible to suggest that there are times that, due to the traumatic events you experienced, your memory is hazy. Firstly, you state Hobbs was not present when your family home was invaded."

"No." Will shook his head. "He always sent in his minions. They were expendable. He rarely made a personal appearance if an attack was in a populated area."

Will heard the tip of Robert's pen scratch against the paper and continued. "Marissa and Georgia were at home. My mom and I arrived and that's when the attack happened. I remember someone yelling for me to run. I got out back, next moment I was slammed to the ground. My dad was following us home in his car and must have heard the ruckus and ran in. I heard shots and screaming and the next thing I remember was being dragged back into the house and seeing my dad on the floor."

"You were driven across state lines to Texas and held in an abandoned fort." Robert gave a dry cough. "It was there Hobbs attacked and killed your sister."

Will stared hard at Robert. "He didn't kill Marissa. This is where the FBI and I parted company. When they rescued me they kept drilling into me to tell the truth but when it came to convicting Garrett, they were begging me to lie."

"If he didn't kill her?"

"Garrett got skittish and wanted to change location but we didn't get far. Marissa was in the car in front, it skidded and crashed into a ditch. She hit her head and for a while she was fine until she wasn't. She kinda went to sleep and didn't wake up. Garrett was inconsolable, he

was grieving so hard I almost felt sorry for him. Can you imagine how sick and twisted that was." Will laughed harshly.

Robert waited for the boy to compose himself. "You then left that location but Marissa's remains....."

"He didn't eat her." Will snarled. "I mean that's what some people were saying later but it wasn't true. He buried her. She was his Omega princess. He wouldn't do that to her."

Robert was aware of the change in the Omega as he delved into his memories. There was a slight shift in the boy's personality as the drawl became more pronounced. "Miggs related how when you were taken to Arkansas, Georgia escaped. He said under direct orders from Hobbs, they tracked her down and killed her in cold blood."

"Garrett told them to bring her back alive." Will washed over his face with his hands. "He needed her. To breed her. There was no sense to having her killed. They'd been drinking all night, not sure they were sober when they left, when they came back they said they couldn't find her."

"And you are adamant Hobbs didn't kill your mother."

"I told Hannibal about McGreevy. I guess he's already relayed that story to you." Will bit at his lower lip. "I've no vested interest to lie about it. McGreevy killed my mom so I persuaded Garrett to kill him. Once Crawford and the FBI hierarchy found out, they knew I couldn't give evidence in court in case it came out. That was when the trial derailed."

"They were afraid you would be charged with murder."

"Uh huh." Will sighed. "Louisiana state officials wanted me back. If I had died, all investments and money held in trust for me would've reverted to the state. I would not have bet on my survival if I had returned cause I was worth more to them dead than alive."

"Then the FBI stepped in."

"The doctors wanted me to be adopted by friends of my grandparents, people I hardly knew. Reckoned it would fix me." Will pushed himself away from the wall and walked casually to Robert's book case. "I knew if I made myself valuable the FBI would keep me. That's when I got lucky, the BAU had an on-going case I was following and I came up with the name of the killers. When Jack and company realised I could re-imagine crime scenes from the perpetrators point of view, game over."

"You became an useful tool."

"When I was with Garrett I'd got so close to him, inside his head, it was if we were one. Even when he was away I felt like we were doing the same things at various times of day. Then I found I could bond with the others." Will grimaced. "It became easy to manipulate them, take control."

"You integrated yourself in order to survive."

"I wasn't looking to survive. I was looking to stop them. Didn't want what happened to me to happen to anyone else so I began to lead them into a trap. When they first took me on a raid I left evidence behind so I could be identified. Found out later no one was looking for me. So I kept pushing them into the north, hoping to establish a pattern, so maybe the FBI would get involved."

"By which time Miggs was already working undercover for the FBI."

"When Abigail and McGreevy put me up for sale they had no idea one of their potential buyers were the FBI. Got to admire Abigail's instincts, she was criminally versatile, ready to cut any deal to stay free. Managed to squirrel away fifty thousands dollars which was a goodwill down payment from the FBI for me." Will laughed. "Jack was so pissed when they couldn't find it."

"William, I believe a clear conscious makes the best pillow. The one question you always seem to have avoided answering, the way Hobbs disposed of his victims."

"He ate his rivals not his victims, believed he would absorb their strength. Once I found out what he was eating, I never touched another meal. Lived off fruit, candy bars, anything I knew he couldn't contaminate." Will sighed before looking from one Alpha to the other. "I honestly don't know if I consumed any of his special meals in the beginning. We were so god damn hungry most of the time, we just ate what was put in front of us but once I saw them preparing one of the bodies....."

"You were skin and bone when they found you, healed fractures....."

"That was Abigail, she liked her fun. She got pleasure out of my suffering, the more I screamed and struggled, the more she enjoyed it."

"Did Hobbs...."

"Are we done?" Will almost pleaded.

"We are done, William." Robert said sympathetically. "You have given more than enough."

Will was almost at the door when he stopped. "After Georgia escaped, it was the not knowing which haunted me, I found myself thinking I'm gonna see her one day. The reason I don't look back anymore is because the words "if only" destroy you. You become bitter about things that can't be undone, hate overtakes you and runs your life. I don't want a life filled with hate, I want the life I have now."

Crawford's summons came out of the blue. Although in the form of a request, Will had learnt from past experience Jack would expect nothing less than complete compliance including a

personal appearance at Quantico. Robert took over proceedings when Hannibal, who besides growling every time Crawford's name was mentioned, produced a list of objections which were insurmountable.

"It would be to our advantage if William were to meet with him. This report Crawford wishes to discuss, it would be far wiser to allow the FBI to take the honour for it's creation and leave young William's name off the credits."

Sitting with a straight back Hannibal had mulled over his father's words before deciding. Hannibal's agreement came with a set of reasonable conditions, besides he and Zeller being present at all times, he reserved the absolute right to curtail the meeting at any moment.

"Jack won't like that." Will had murmured and had received a glare of pure anger from his husband. "Sorry, Han, but Jack isn't the enemy. Maybe I put things in that report I shouldn't have."

"As none of us were aware of it's existence until after the death of Budge." Hannibal had snarled. "It may have served you better to consult with my father before it was submitted."

Will's response to his Alpha's anger shook him to the core. Ready one moment to spring to his own defence, he inexplicably wrapped his arms around his midriff, lowered his head and began to cry. Hearing his Alpha exhale a sigh of frustration, Will found himself sobbing as his hormones swamped him.

"Hey, hey." Hannibal cooed as he knelt in front of the Omega. "I am angry with Crawford not with you. I am wrong to take this out on you, Will, I just want to keep you here, so I can protect you."

As the Omega's tears began to subside, Robert felt a wave of relief but couldn't prevent a roll of his eyes when, after Will declared his love for his Alpha, another bout of sobbing occurred.

It wasn't that the emotional onslaught had arrived without warning, Bedelia had taken both Hannibal and Robert aside once confirmation had been received. She cautioned them on the pitfalls of an Omegan pregnancy and chronicled the firestorm of hormones which once engulfing the Omega would reach it's zenith during the third trimester. There was a logical reason why Alphas rarely left their Omega's side during the last month of pregnancy, Bedelia had explained, the Alpha's scent would calm the anxious Omega and would induce a positive attitude. Hannibal had found the middle ground as Will went from the highs to the lows, by touching and cuddling his Omega, he kept Will balanced.

For the most part the Omega had been cheerful, but when Hannibal found Will clutching the bed sobbing, announcing the child should be given to another carer as he would be a terrible parent, Hannibal had found himself helpless as his Omega disassembled himself psychologically. When Will declared himself selfish for wanting to reproduce purely to replicate his lost family, the Alpha found he had no words to counter the statement. Instead, he had sat with the Omega laying across him, his head in the Alpha's lap recounting, how he, Hannibal Lecter had been ensnared the day he had first scented the young Omega in Chilton's office. How he had fought, when every fibre of his being had told him he had found his

perfect mate and it wasn't until Will had stood in front of Chilton, defending him with a murderous look in his eyes, that Hannibal had admitted defeat.

"At that moment, one false move and you would have flung yourself at me and ripped out my throat with your teeth." Hannibal had soothed. "You were untamed, a wild beauty and I knew I had to have you beside me always. There and then I wanted to taste you, claim your innocence."

The passion which erupted from the Omega had been totally unexpected and a naked Will had lain on the bed whilst the Alpha had pleasured him with his mouth. Bringing out the loudest moans Hannibal had ever heard from the Omega had been breath taking, as had the boy's tongue over Hannibal's throbbing erection when he returned the favour. For the following week the Omega had been docile, giving Hannibal advice on speeches he would soon be making, correcting the drafts to make them Omega friendly. Hannibal had often found himself laughing out loud as Will nuzzled his neck complaining the Alpha looked too damned serious and needed to chill.

Freddie's article wasn't the viperish attack Will had anticipated. He had been painted the "tragic" Omega who had been trapped in a nightmare existence by a lunatic. A picture of Will and Hannibal leaving Holly's showed the happy couple walking hand in hand. By contrast, another taken when Will first arrived at Quantico showed a gaunt looking boy with dead eyes. It was the promise of a more detailed account to follow which froze Will's blood.

"She's going to build me up before she knocks me down." Will said grimly.

Hannibal brushed the hair back from the Omega's face. "Unfortunately that is her style. She is no fool, Will, a story such as this will have a short half life so she will ease out the information in order to keep her flock coming back for more."

Hannibal kissed the Omega softly on the mouth then on the tip of the nose drawing out a smile from the boy. "Have faith, Will. I am sure my father and the FBI have already set their wheels in motion."

Although Hannibal's injury had healed, Zeller took the wheel recommending his brother drove shorter measured distances before attempting a long journey. Will sat in the back watching the countryside changing as they moved closer to the training academy. He had pulled on a baggy sweater not wishing to show off his figure, to avoid undue attention from people who may remember him as the curly headed kid. Zeller had fired questions at him during the drive and to Will it was obvious Zeller was excited at the prospect of taking a peek behind the FBI's curtains. Will had tried to keep his composure but found the closer they were to their destination the quicker his heart thumped. When the outline of the building

came into view, Will closed his eyes and saw the golden blade swing. He pulled all the memories of agents, administrators and directors from his past into view and studied their mannerisms and syntax until he discovered the perfect mind set. Met at the entrance and escorted to Jack, Will put on his best game face and adopted the persona most suited for the performance.

Jack had greeted them in a friendly manner and as they took their seats informed them another agent would soon be joining them. Hannibal had responded with an air which was both reasonable and cool headed, making it clear to the head of the BAU that the Omega would only be allowed to discuss the report.

"The report Will gave Agent Katz has intell which may be of use to the Bureau."
Jack mused. "We needed clarification to be certain we hadn't misconstrued Will's findings."

"Will did not act alone which makes me inquire why the others are not present." Hannibal's voice echoed Crawford's voice both in tone and volume.

"Will was on the right track. Just needed a little help getting into the station."

"Jack, the report is supposition, not canon." Will interceded.

"Application of supposition and unexplained leaps." Crawford's words took both he and Will back to another time. "Mr Lecter, Will achieved a high success rate by applying his imagination to various criminal simulations. We just need to borrow his imagination one more time."

Hannibal shook his head astonished how easily the head of the BAU had begun the manipulation. "Will has permission to discuss the report but nothing more."

"Sorry, Jack, get caught up with the DOJ." The rotund Beta who entered the office concentrated purely on Crawford as he approached the table.

"Well, well, well." Jorgensen didn't try to hide his sarcasm as he took his seat. "The baby is going to have a baby."

Will could feel the tension rise in his Alpha, Hannibal's strong masculine scent was now seasoned with a hint of burning wood. Jack, nervously looking between Hannibal and Jorgensen, gained Will's sympathy.

"Missed you too." Will spat back at Jorgensen and he could hear some of the breath held by his Alpha being released.

"Doctor Lecter, Mr Lecter, I would like to introduce Special Agent Paul Jorgensen.

Jorgensen's nod in the men's direction was accompanied by a thin lipped smile. In a voice dripping with sarcasm, he began to speak. "Mr Lecter, do you know what astounds me about your Omega. I have worked my tail off to get to where I am today. For years I have studied killers, delved into the minds of the very worst. Due to my expertise, I am often called in to assist on cases that seem unsolvable. Then along comes Will out of nowhere. He just sniffs

the wind and plucks a name out of thin air. He is always so damned certain, it makes me sick."

Crawford addressed Hannibal and Zeller. "Will makes leaps no one else can explain."

"The evidence explains." Will protested.

"You **see** the killers, Will."

"I just connect the dots."

"You tagged Tobias Budge as a serial killer."

"You have to collect the dots to connect them. No one was collecting, Jack."

"There was something about Budge that stood out. Otherwise you wouldn't have investigated him." Jack's attempts to emphasise his point invariably ended with him on the verge of shouting out the words.

"When he threatened me it was theatrical, grandiose. The Douglas Wilson murder was theatrical. It was just layer upon layer, Jack, a team effort. Without Frederick, Abel and Jimmy, I wouldn't have gotten the evidence."

"You sensed something about him, Will. You, not the others." Jack tossed his pen onto the desk and leaned back in exasperation. "When I saw Chilton at the hospital and asked what made Budge a suspect, he mentioned his god damn eyes."

"I didn't divine what was going on inside his head, magic it up." Will took a deep breath. "He threw out the names Journos, Bellini and Gerard. I checked them out and come up with three musicians who rose to great power through their ruthlessness. Their common denominator being they eliminated anyone who stood in their way or criticised them."

"So, because he was a fan boy of the wrong group, it put him on your radar." Jorgensen scoffed.

"Basic profiling. He had motive, opportunity and his personality fitted the kill method. He was flamboyant, pretentious, all razzle-dazzle. Thought he was smarter than everyone else. Where did you find Hatcher?"

"Freezer. At the Froideveaux house." Jack replied.

"Hatcher froze their budget so Budge reciprocated. Probably put him in there while he was still alive."

"So glad you enlightened us, Graham, may have taken us old fossils years to work it out." Jorgensen sneered. "It must be hard for you, thinking you're better than the BAU because you are different."

"If that's the con you're running for yourself, Jorgensen, then maybe I'm better cause some people around here are just inept."

"Your disrespect towards me doesn't go unnoticed, Will." Jorgensen smiled through gritted teeth.

"Good." Will grinned. "Thought I'd lost my touch."

"Cut it out, both of you." Jack snapped. "You suggested Budge was trying to emulate another killer. Who was he trying to impress, Will?"

"I don't know, Jack. Maybe he was in contact with another killer or he just followed the kills. In Europe, he was a fledgling killer, never killed like this before. Maybe the other killer was the sorcerer and Budge was his apprentice. It was his training before his becoming."

"Practise makes perfect."

"Jack, I trawled through European newspapers following a gut instinct about Budge. Do you know how difficult every step was? I saw a pattern taking shape and knew I would have to convince others to accept it. Knowing something and proving something are two different things. It wasn't till the others came on board did I get usable facts. Jack, I'm an eighteen year old Omega. I'm no superhero, can't fly, can't kick ass. I've given you the information but it is up to you what happens to it next. Jack, I'm done here, the press are all over you and me. The last thing any of us needs is for Freddie Lounds to find out I warned you about Budge. If I'm right about Budge killing before, you won't want that out there either."

"**We** have the resources, Will, so **we** followed the trail. In every city Budge killed, at least one month before, there were other murders. We know Budge wasn't responsible for the earlier killings because we confirmed his whereabouts. The evidence isn't conclusive but it is compelling. Was Budge following in the footsteps of another killer? Did they know each other, meet, kill together?"

"Budge was a musician and admired the greats in his field. He lapped up any praise thrown his way. It's no great stretch to believe when he started to kill he would look for inspiration. A mentor. Wilson's death was a serenade, a performance. Just find out which high profile killers Stateside were active prior to Wilson's death then you may have your answer."

"The Ripper. Every time the Ripper kills it's theatre. That's his modus operandi."

"Still ringing that same old bell, Jack. I don't know if Budge knew the Ripper or admired him. Not sure it was the Ripper. One thing I'm sure of. Tobias Budge won't ever kill again."

"I want you to look over some crime scene photos. They were supplied by Europol. Just want to know if you can identify a signature."

Will squirmed in his seat before Hannibal took control. "Given Will's condition I am putting a stop to these proceedings."

"Shame. Been doing a little research of my own and finally discovered why Will's family was targeted. Still, another time perhaps." Jorgensen said as he pushed his chair back from the table.

"No, no..." Will protested. "You can't leave it like that."

Hannibal found himself looking into blue eyes, pleading with him.

"This deal you are trying to broker is cruel." Hannibal spat out at Jorgensen. His eyes dark as coal focused like a laser on the agent.

"I'm afraid the excellent administrative instincts of the FBI are not often tempered by mercy." Jorgenson replied giving a sly glance in the direction of Hannibal. "We are not a charitable organisation, Mr Lecter, we are here to solve crimes and save lives."

"It's okay." Will tried to reassure his Alpha. "I can do this."

"First tell Will your discovery then he may fulfil your request." Hannibal said holding his anger in check.

Addressing Will only, Jorgensen never looked away from the boy's face. "You believed someone tipped Hobbs off about your family's wealth. Perhaps someone close was taking a cut. We found evidence that Abigail Hobbs attended orientation classes at several Omega schools, three of which were in the north. An Omega college in Minnesota contacted the police and claimed that a young Alpha girl using fake Omega scent and I D had gained access to the grounds, invited some of the girls back to her hotel room after the session. This was six months before the attack on your family. My contacts in the south did some digging and there were similar reports in Florida and South Carolina." Jorgensen took out a folded sheet of paper from his jacket pocket and gave it to Will. "This was taken from the security cameras at the Minnesota school by the police."

Will didn't need to look long at the grainy image to identify the girl. "Abigail Hobbs."

"Will, the Omega school you and your sisters attended in New Orleans was exclusive and the fees expensive. Even a man like Hobbs would have realised only those with money could have afforded to send their children there. Those homes Hobbs invaded, it was all about their money not a personal vendetta."

"You're saying Marissa and Abigail's paths just crossed one day."

"Two Omega girls went missing from colleges before your family was attacked." Jorgensen's voice was subdued.

"Third time's the charm. Guess, it was easier to believe in a conspiracy than to accept it was down to bad luck." Will slumped back into his chair still looking at the paper. "I'll look at the photos then I wanna go home."

Hannibal had been reluctant to leave Crawford's office. The explanation that Will needed to be alone did not satisfy the Alpha but after some additional reassurance from Will, Hannibal had followed the rest into the corridor. Crawford had handled them expertly, Hannibal had thought as they were guided into the examination room. The technicians went about their work, with just a casual glance towards the incomers, whilst Jack explained the mechanics of their tasks. Zeller absorbed every word, his professional curiosity aroused by

the technicians whose focused attention to the smallest detail left them oblivious to Crawford's narration. Hannibal made it clear with the conspicuous glances at his watch his interest lay elsewhere.

"If you want to know about Will's rescue. Ask Agent Katz." Crawford said pointing to the dark haired Beta standing to one side.

Hannibal knew he didn't need an introduction but still held out a hand to the woman as he drew near.

"Hannibal Lecter. I am Will's Alpha." He had decided, after Jorgensen's attempts at blackmail, to use the more formal definition of his status.

He had felt a little perplexed as her eye's travelled the full length of his body before she shook his hand. "Didn't know Will had such great taste."

Her words had surprised him but seeing her sassy smile, he could understand why Will spoke so fondly of her. "Agent Crawford said if I wanted to know about how Will was freed, I should talk to you.

Beverly sucked in the air as the image flashed through her mind. "We stormed the place, lots of noise and confusion, then saw this frightened skinny kid cowering in a cage. He didn't know who the hell we were but when we tried to release him, he stood his ground. He told me later he thought we were traffickers. He zoned in on me. Said if I answered his question truthfully then he would trust me. Asked if his sister, Georgia was alive. I'll never forget his face when I told him she was dead, told him where she was found and how her notes had helped us find him. He walked over, handed me the key, then closed down. From the time he got out of there until he arrived at Quantico, he never said a word."

"You stayed by his side so he would confide in you, tell you details of his captivity."

"Sure I was under instruction to find out what happened but I knew you never asked on Omega outright, right, you just let them talk. Eventually he told me enough."

"Enough to satisfy the authorities or enough to unburden himself."

"Will had it tough, even here. People were always trying to get inside his head, unscramble him. Jack decided what Will told me was sufficient for official purposes and put an end to the questioning."

"Yet even though you were close, once Will left for the Sanctuary you kept your distance.

Beverly placed on a hand on her hip and wore a defiant look. "I knew if I kept in touch Will would involve himself in the cases the FBI were working on."

"You considered this unhealthy." Hannibal kept to a neutral tone.

"Jack Crawford's obsessed with catching the Chesapeake Ripper. Guess I was scared he would groom Will to go that way too."

"Is it so bad if it means one less killer roaming the country." Hannibal fished.

"There's no shallow end in the FBI. You either sink or swim." Beverly drummed her fingers against her hip bone. "Will's a novelty but when the shine wears off, he'll become a commodity. They would throw him in the deep end to close a case, even if he couldn't swim."

"You paint a damning picture of this agency."

"Just telling it as it is. Do you know why Omegas were kept out of law enforcement? They would get so involved in the investigations they'd fall apart."

"But you believe that Will is capable of catching these killers." Hannibal couldn't prevent his curiosity taking control.

"Will told me that he saw things differently to other people, felt differently. He has a very specific way of thinking but there are days when even Will can't control his own imagination. He gets lost."

"Will is attracted to law enforcement and as his friends do not think such work would be conducive to his well being, it would appear Will might need a champion to keep the FBI at bay."

"He has one, doesn't he?" Beverly's mouth fashioned a half smile. "He has you."

The return to the office was sudden after Will, standing on the edge of the examination room, barked out. "I'm done, Jack."

Both Crawford and Jorgensen resumed their seats but Will, with Hannibal and Zeller each side of him, stood in front of Crawford's desk and handed over the files.

"There's four, Jack, not three. But you already knew that." Will sighed wearily.

Crawford took the folders and placed them on his desk, shuffling them around until they were in a straight line.

"Leipzig, Milan, Lyon." Crawford tapped each file, stopping when he reached the fourth.

"Florence?." Jorgensen asked then exhaled noisily when Crawford nodded. "Seems you haven't lost your touch, Will."

"Our killer has been improving his skills abroad. Will, we're closer to knowing who he is. If you looked at the current case....."

"No more." Hannibal put his hand on Will's shoulder. "Will has done what was asked of him and now you are intending to coerce him into helping you further. As both of you are employed by the FBI and are paid handsomely, I suggest you solve the crimes yourselves rather than rely on the boy."

"Mr Lecter, I'm not sure you understand the extent of Will's ability." Crawford explained with an air of condescension.

"I am well aware the ability Will possesses may be useful to law enforcement so I will make my position clear. We are married and under the rules of protocol I can intercede to keep Will from danger, even if he may not see it for himself. Therefore, gentlemen, with respect, do not call on Will again."

"Outwardly liberal but secretly relishing the ownership of someone as rare as Will. You are altruistic. You relish the challenge but always expect to win. You will not allow anything to encroach on your private life." Jorgensen locked Hannibal with a cold stare. "You are possessive but keep it hidden. Not even Will realises that keeping him under your control is more important than the lives he could possibly save."

"You consider you know me. Therefore not wishing to disappoint you, I will respond in the stereotypical Alpha fashion you expect from me and use the time-honoured phrase which cannot be misunderstood." Hannibal gave a sardonic smile. "Will Graham is mine and any attempt to come between us will have serious consequences. For both of you. Good bye."

They left the building at a leisurely pace. Hannibal had stood aside as Will said his farewells to Beverly later commenting the Beta had impressed him. The drive back had been quieter, Will felt washed out and managed to drift into a light sleep for half the journey. He had discarded the baggy sweater as soon as they returned home, laying on his own bed he had stared at the ceiling moving Jack's files around inside his head. As he dissected the crime scenes from the files Jack had permitted him to see, he became aware he was no longer alone.

"Lost in thought, Will?" Hannibal was leaning against the frame of the door, tie missing and minus the jacket of his suit.

"Jorgensen was trying to rile you, make you feel guilty. He was hoping you would allow me to continue working on the pretext of saving lives."

Hannibal walked over and sat on the edge of the bed looking down at the Omega. His hair was borderline unkempt with strands falling over his brow. It was the style Will preferred.

"I am a business man, Will. I have met the likes of Crawford and Jorgensen before. When you have served your usefulness they will toss you aside. Of course they will pay lip service once they have broken you, give their condolences but during that time they will be looking for somebody new to take your place. They do not care about you, Will, not in the way you imagine. They promote the idea of the FBI family to support your fantasy but in reality it is only a myth."

"They're not devils trying to trick me into selling my soul. Jack cares." Will protested.

"Jack cares but when it comes to how far he is willing to push you to get what he wants, he is no saint." Hannibal lay his hand onto the swollen abdomen of his Omega. "You were different with them. Not shy or diffident, you were confident and outspoken. I hardly recognised you."

"Can't go all Omega on them. They'd lose all respect for me."

"It crossed my mind whether I really know you. Which version of Will Graham is the real one?" Will could sense from the Alpha's tone he wanted an affirmation.

"I don't know." Will said honestly. "Not sure sometimes even if I am real. It feels like I'm just a reflection of other people."

"And when you are with me? What does it feel like then?"

Will smiled broadly. "It feels like home."

Will gave his approval later. As they lay together, settling down for sleep, Hannibal's arm in it's customary position over the Omega, Will murmured the words as a goodnight. "Jorgensen was wrong. You're protecting not controlling me and your reasons are solid. And the way I feel right now, well that's just fine by me."

Freddie saw the figure in the shadows as she returned to her motel room. A moments hesitation, the overcoat and fedora took her fears away.

"Hello, Jack. I'm surprised to see you."

Crawford took a step into the light, his hands pushed deep into his pockets. "Everywhere you go, you contaminate crime scenes. That's obstructing justice."

"I appear to have upset you, Jack."

"Imagine how difficult life could get if the next time I had you arrested."

"Like you, I'm just doing my job."

"If you poke a hornet's nest you are going to get stung. My advice. Leave it alone."

"So, Jack, which nest should I avoid poking."

"Don't write another word about Will Graham."

The last few weeks had been the worst. Hannibal now working exclusively from home spent most of his time cooking for the Omega, rubbing away back aches and massaging tired feet. Encouraging Will to at least visit Holly's for a meal, Will became aware he was the centre of attention, mainly from male Alphas. Will carried high and although his clothes were suitably fitted to disguise his condition, his scent did not. He reeked of fertility and the experience of an Alpha standing next to him, suggestively growling, suddenly being thrown across the room by the volcanic tempered Hannibal, was enough to make Will reluctant to

leave the confines of his home. The second incident ensured he did not. Making their way across the parking area from Tocca's office, the altercation between an Alpha and his heavily pregnant mate had spurred Will into action. A few paces behind her Alpha and with three children in tow, the woman had begged her husband to slow down and was rewarded with a hard slap across the face. Will pulled from Hannibal's grip and what began as an emotionally charged verbal confrontation with the man ended, after he had advanced towards Will, with Hannibal suddenly wedged between them, grabbing the man and splaying him on his back over the nearest car. The man had issued threats but they seemed to pale in comparison to the many Hannibal had snarled in return and given the opportunity to escape, the Alpha had taken it. Will had stood in front of the woman protecting her and with the mate slinking away, Hannibal and Will waited with the family until Alana arrived and whisked the family to the safety of the Omega clinic with Will muttering he was now staying behind closed doors.

"Will's upstairs." Bedelia said in answer to Hannibal's question. "He's been complaining his back ache has worsened. It is possibly the onset of labour."

As her son turned away from her to find his mate, she called after him. "Hannibal, keep things calm. Never forget Will's a young Omega and emotionally he is not as strong as he would like us to believe."

Hannibal had never asked to be admitted to Will's mediation room, but as his trespass was for a good reason. this was going to be the one exception. Two light taps on the door followed by the turn of the handle was met with no opposition.

The room was in half light, the battery operated lantern seconded from the hall was sufficient for Hannibal to see a figure huddled in the corner under the window. Sitting on cushions with a blanket draped around his shoulders, Will sat with head down. Hannibal didn't ask for permission as he moved across the small space and gently lowered himself beside his mate.

"Stupid, huh, stereotypical Omega behaviour. Finding the smallest, safest spot to nest." Will softly said.

"Are you in pain?" Hannibal calmly asked.

"No, not pain, more like cramps. Nauseating cramps."

"Have your waters broken."

Will sniffed a little. "My pants feel a little damp but there's been no great flood, no biblical deluge."

"What do you want to do, Will? We can leave now or time the contractions as Doctor Tocca suggested." Hannibal moved his position to allow his fingertips to ghost over the Omega's face.

"I need to get my act together." Will gave another sniff and although the boy's face wasn't damp, Hannibal had the sense before his arrival there had been tears. "I'm er..... scared."

"We will leave for the hospital now so we can take the drive slowly. If you need to hold on to something then hold on to me. Believe me, beautiful, I will not leave your side." Hannibal's voice was at it's velvet best. "You will be fine, Will. You will have the very best of care."

Scenting his partner's positivity Will replied. "It's time. Let's go."

It didn't take Will long to change into new clothes, his Alpha watching and assisting when asked.

"Just one more thing." Will said as Hannibal picked up the pre-packed bag. Walking to the chair in the corner of their bedroom, Will took up the shirt Hannibal had changed from earlier. Holding it to his nose, he inhaled deeply before sheepishly looking at this mate. "Can I take this, it's got your scent on it?"

"Of course." Bemused Hannibal took the shirt from Will's outstretched hand and unzipped a side pocket, folding the shirt carefully before placing it inside the bag.

By the time they had completed their careful descent to the bottom of the stairs, Bedelia was waiting for them, clutching her purse. " I'll drive so you can take care of Will."

Hannibal smiled a thanks and walked at Will's pace along the hallway, waiting at the entrance as Bedelia walked to the garage. Looking up at his Alpha, the reality hit him and Will smiled.

"We'll be soon holding our baby."

Soothing his hand over the expanded abdomen, Will was relieved to be laying on the bed in the birthing suite. The physical changes had happened gradually over the last two weeks, the connective and fatty tissues situated midway along the raphe ridge had softened and separated as the walls of the canalis ova became thin and elastic in preparation for the birth.

"All Omega babies are born with the blue spot at the base of the spine, so we will be able to determine the child's dynamic soon after birth." The nurse had spoken to Hannibal as if this were the most important part of the birthing process and had received a polite but muted thank you in return.

As the contractions increased Will frequently changed position finding it difficult to get comfortable. Hannibal, as promised, was at his side and although concern crept into the Alpha's smile, he spoke words of encouragement.

"How long?" Will snarled as Doctor Tocca finished her examination. Will no longer experienced the shyness which once had come with these intrusions, having thrown all his inhibitions out of the window once labour had started.

"You're fully dilated, Will. Each birth is different, it could take another two hours or he could arrive within thirty minutes."

"Can't you move it along." Will whined. "Can't take this anymore."

Lying on his side, Will moaned as his mate brushed the curls away from his sweaty brow then finally after gentle persuasion grabbed the mask that had been offered and inhaled.

"Nitrous oxide, it will take the edge off." Hannibal's voice was left far behind as Will temporarily floated high amongst the clouds.

"Do not concern yourself if the baby is a below average weight." Tocca reassured Will. "Babies of duals grow faster than others during the first six months."

After forty five minutes, Will felt the sudden urge, rolling over and positioning himself on his knees, one hand gripped Hannibal's shoulder and the other the squatting bars at the head of the bed. Regulating his breathing as he had been taught by sporadically panting, Will followed every instruction given to him by the doctor until giving out a shout of relief as baby Lecter finally made his appearance followed by a few well timed cries.

Will waited patiently while he and his son were attended to, with the cord clamped then cut and the baby weighed, he sighed as the reward for all his effort was placed in his arms.

"A seven pound Alpha boy." Tocca allowed herself a smile. "In dual terms, a major production."

"He is perfect." Hannibal marvelled at the tiny features.

"We need a name for registration purposes but if you haven't decided?" Tocca inquired.

"Andrius." Will said emphatically.

"Andrius Graham Lecter." The name rolled off Hannibal's tongue.

For Will, the mixture of joy and pride on his Alpha's face washed away the memories of the pain. "Do you want to hold him."

As Hannibal sat next to him and the infant was transferred into his arms, Will finally felt complete.

The two day compulsory stay in hospital hadn't been so daunting. The baby slept for almost seven hours after the birth and Will spent much of the time receiving congratulations from visitors and watching his son take small breaths. With Hannibal in the room, Will could lull his mind into a state of slumber, aware someone else was protecting his young. When the first cries of hunger filled the room, Will was grateful the kindly Beta nurse showed him the technique and the agitated infant quickly latched onto a nipple. Offering her support, she stayed on during the first feed.

"Producing colostrum is perfectly natural for Omegas with duality for the first few days but your little one will adapt to formula once you dry up." She informed him. "Omegas used to live in large communities and duals would only become pregnant when a number of females were already carrying. Had a ready supply of wet nurses. Nowadays it's dishwasher safe BPA free bottles. "

Will found his own routine when he returned to DuMaurier house. His former bedroom was transformed, the bed and armoire a distant memory having been replaced with a sleeper sofa and furniture more suited for a child. The crib took pride of place, chosen by Hannibal, it was stylish and modern.

"The staff at the Sanctuary helped. Frederick took the helm alongside mother, apparently they were a formidable team." Hannibal laughed at the idea. "Father called them the dynamic duo."

Will stood overwhelmed. "It's wonderful." He managed before the ache in his throat was too much and the tears began to fall.

The Alpha's strong arm was immediately around his shoulder, pulling him closer and as Hannibal pressed his nose into the Omega's curls, he whispered. "You are home, Will, with your family."

"Can you at least keep quiet during the local news." Robert protested.

"I'm sorry." Will giggled. "Honestly, I'm trying."

"Suck on a Werther's or a Jolly Rancher." Robert huffed. "That usually shuts you up."

Bedelia got up from her chair and took the baby from Will's arms, shaking her head. "You could turn up the volume, Robert."

"I've tried in the past but that pesky Omega just purrs louder." Robert huffed again. "I just would like for once to be able to hear what the news reporters are actually saying without resorting to lip reading."

Will got up and walked over to the bureau, taking a piece of the hard candy from the jar, he unwrapped it and popped it into his mouth. Settling back down on the couch, Bedelia returned the infant to the Omega, the sitting room quietened until the ring tone from the house phone woke the baby and prompted the mewling.

"Good grief. It's a conspiracy." Robert growled as Will crunched the contents in his mouth, swallowed and resumed his soft, vibrant sound. Getting out of his chair and crossing the room, Robert paused and glanced at his grandson, Will looking up with a warm smile earned an affectionate wink from his father-in-law.

"It's only for the first three months, Robert." Bedelia called after her husband as he left the room. "Until Will and Andrius have completed their bond."

"Six more bloody weeks." Came the reply from the hallway as Robert picked up the hand set.

As he cooed his son Will did not notice Robert's return until he heard his name called.

"That was Jack Crawford. He wanted you to hear it from him." Robert said without emotion. "Garrett Jacob Hobbs and his daughter are dead."

Chapter 39

Freddie pounced as Robert entered the foyer of his club. "You set Jack Crawford on me."

Agent Green made a move to intercede but Robert gestured for him to halt. "Miss Lounds, I have absolutely no idea what you are talking about."

"Jack was doing your dirty work." Freddie spat out.

"I can assure you, Miss Lounds, I do my own dirty work. It's much more fun."

A furious Freddie scowled at the Alpha. "Crawford threatened to make my life difficult if I wrote about your son-in-law."

"I have not made any request of Jack Crawford. If he acted then he did so of his own volition." Robert said sincerely. "I am assuming from your hostility, our special arrangement is over."

"What is it about Will Graham that makes people rush to his aid?"

"He's kind, thoughtful and honest. All the attributes sadly, Miss Lounds, you lack."

"It'll be a tough world out there for him, Mr Lecter, should Will ever venture on his own." Freddie oozed spite. "Tell him to stay at home and stick to what suits him best. Changing diapers and pushing out babies."

Unruffled, Robert casually glanced at his constant companion. "Agent Green, would you kindly escort Miss Lounds from these premises. Standing near her is lowering my social standing."

Hannibal stood rooted as the young Omega finished singing the lullaby, smiling, Will brushed a goodnight kiss on their son's forehead. Hannibal accepted the closeness between his Omega and the baby, Will hardly ever leaving their son's side. Hannibal knew it was part of the bonding procedure so was determined never to make it an issue, rather he felt a fascination observing the boy's Omegan qualities begin to dominate his every action. The outpouring of love and attention Will bestowed on the infant was constant, whether surrounded by family or when Hannibal walked into their bedroom, he would hear purring or humming emitting from the Omega. In return Andrius would make a strange gurgling for his Papa alone.

"He's trying to growl." Will said with certainty the first time Hannibal was present when Andrius made the sound. Hannibal wondered if this information was fanciful

thinking or a genetic memory only Omegas possessed. Whatever the source, Hannibal laughed warmly whenever Will's words repeated in his head.

The Alpha lay on his side, watching his mate make his way to the bed, appreciating his form. Will's wayward hair partially covered his face as he bent forward to pull back the covers and Hannibal fought the urge to grasp the curls, pull the boy forward and bite into his slender neck. As the boy settled onto the mattress, he cast a hungry look at the Alpha. He had shown no interest in sex for months, informing Hannibal after the birth it would take weeks for his body to tighten up. The Alpha had been respectful when the Omega had sought him out in bed to be held. Hannibal had been happy to provide nothing other than comfort. The boy knelt on the bed and his eyes roved over the half naked Alpha. The boy reached forward and a hand smoothed over the Alpha's sculptured biceps, a touch so gentle it suggested the Omega half expected the Alpha would flinch from the fingers. Will's hand crossed over the chest, lightly brushing against the mass of dark hairs then followed the dark centre line down to the pyjama waistband. For the sexually shy Omega to make an advance was unusual and the Alpha felt his heart rate increase by the rare approach.

"I.. I need you to want me." Will said blushing as he wet his fingers with his tongue, pushing under the waist band until he felt the Alpha's erection.

Hannibal, eyes half closed, inhaled deeply in time with every stroke until he was close to the point of no return. Pulling the hand away, he raised himself upright until he was facing the boy. "Do you have doubts about my feelings towards you?"

"Insecure I guess." Will said blushing. "I need you to want me sexually."

One hand on the boy's waist, another caressing the back of his head, Will shivered under the hot passionate kiss. Breaking free, Hannibal's lips twitched into a smile and his eyes devoured the boy. His hand left the neck and travelling up under the fabric, his hand glided over the Omega's chest, his thumb teasing a nipple. Will bared his neck as the soft, sensuous touches ignited a chain reaction through his body. As the Alpha's mouth returned to the Omega, his tongue pushed past the boy's parted lips exploring. Each and every touch was sensitive, until Will pushed the Alpha back and snarled.

"I won't break."

Will tugged the tee over his head, throwing it aside and as the Alpha discarded the pyjama bottoms, Will's eyes swept over the exposed length. With passion making him slick, his scent deeper, cherry tinged with spice, he was dizzy with desire. He nipped at the Alpha's neck with his teeth then through a fringe of dark lashes and with a smile just short of a sneer, he teased.

"Do you really think you can overpower me, Alpha?"

The Alpha instantly angled him until he was face down on the bed, then by the hips hoisted his rear into the air. The boxers were pulled aggressively down to his knees and the Omega found himself panting with frenzied expectation. Thumbs massaged his cheeks gradually spreading him, until he felt his Alpha, slow at first then powerfully filling him with his whole length. He was covered by the masculine body, one hand on the pillow with fingers tangled

into his curls, another by his side bracing the Alpha as he rewarded the boy for his insolence. The Omega stifled his sounds with a hand until the voice close to his ear threatened.

"The longer you remain quiet, the rougher I will be."

Losing control Will pushed back against the torrent of thrusts and moaned incessantly into his pillow, only when the thick warmth from the Alpha filled him, did they finally slow.

Will watched the rise and fall of the Alpha's chest as they lay side by side. "I heard your voice mail.....the day Budge attacked. I kinda guessed you thought you were going to die and wanted to say nice things to make me feel better."

"I said what was important. I needed you to know you were cherished."

Will thought through the words before speaking, worried he was about to make a mistake but instinct told him the Alpha would prefer the truth. "It's like an unspoken rule and it's unfair. I'm afraid of using the words I love you even during moments like this."

"When you are in love you make yourself vulnerable, give someone the power to destroy you. I will never betray you, Will, so if they bring you happiness, say those words."

"I promise I won't beg you into saying them, but just tell me you're happy from time to time. Okay?"

Will felt the Alpha's long fingers comb through his curls. "Before you, there was a shallowness and emptiness to my existence as I found myself playing a role which was pitched perfectly to impress. There is a naivety about you, Will, which allows freedom and as a result for the first time in a relationship, I am allowed to be myself. You have made my world a far more interesting and happier place. "

Will knew without looking, as he revelled in the sentiment, the rich brown eyes were on him. "Wow, how did I do that?"

"By constantly surprising me."

"You first growled when you were six." Bedelia set the tray on the coffee table. "You and Valdas started the same day. As I recollect the pair of you were in a tug-of-war over a toy and you growled first then Valdas returned the compliment."

Hannibal eased his body fractionally in the chair, cradling Andrius in one arm, he took hold of the lamb rattle and walked it along his thigh towards his son.

"His eyes are changing colour." Frederick's statement sounded almost accusatory.

"Yeah, they're going brown." Will replied. "He's got Hannibal's eyes."

"His hair is fair as well."

Will closed the album resting on his knees. "Yeah, definitely takes after his father."

Hannibal sat in the chair watching Frederick squirm. "Well at least you chose the name, Will."

Hannibal allowed Frederick a moment of satisfaction before speaking. "My father named Andrius. It is a family tradition. The head of the family always names the male child."

"Still, it is honour of Will's father. Isn't it?" Frederick sounded almost despondent.

"It is Frederick ." Robert looked up from the album Will had passed to him earlier. "It is customary to name the child after someone who is cherished or held in great esteem. From listening to you and Will speak of Andrew Graham, it is apparent he was both. Naturally, I consulted with Will before making the final decision."

Robert's remarks pulled a smile from Frederick. "Andrew had a lazy confidence, a middle of the road surety. I never understood why he choose me for a friend."

"Dad told me once all his friends had a commonality, they were honest, morally worthy and had a great sense of humour. So I guess that's why you and dad were good friends." The words tripped off Will's tongue readily and Hannibal saw the Beta had been caught off balance. For the briefest of moments, he could see Frederick's bottom lip quiver before control returned.

Will closed the album and returned it to the pile by the side of his chair. The boy's decision to open the second box from NOGA was more whimsy than well planned. A distaction, Hannibal had thought to the news of the demise of Hobbs as they waited on the promise made by Crawford to supply further information. Finding his grandparents albums filled with pictures of strangers led to Frederick's assistance and for a second afternoon Frederick attempted to give names to the faces which stared back at him.

"Your Grandfather Cassini had quite a few rich and powerful friends. For an Omega living in Florida, he certainly lived a lavish lifestyle. No one was quite sure how it was funded." It was Frederick's asides which helped Hannibal fill in the pieces of the puzzle which was Will Graham.

"Dad said people called him Splash the Cash Cassini."

"Everyone called him Cash. On the few occasions I actually met with him, it was how he introduced himself. I think he found it amusing. He did not hide his wealth. It was one of the things your father found rather irksome. Andrew was by no means poor, legally he was entitled to all the interest from the Graham investments, but chose to receive a limited amount. Both your parents preferred to live modestly."

"How did your parents meet?" Bedelia asked the Omega.

"Dad used to fix motor boats as a hobby then took up working in yards. Used his skills to go on an adventure travelling around the south. Wound up in Florida and by chance worked on the Cassini yacht. That's where he first met my mom. Anyhow Grandpa Cassini knew they were falling for each other and didn't want his daughter hitched to someone he thought poor, so he sent my mom away to finish her schooling in Italy. My dad said he kinda drifted for the next two years until he read about the Omega debutante ball and saw my mom's name. So he wangled an invite, bought an expensive suit and went to a fancy salon to get all prettied up. By the end of the ball my mom was in love with my dad and Grandpa Cassini was in love with my dad's money."

Hannibal laughed appreciatively, impressed how easily Will had shared his story. Aware of the difficulty which usually overcome the Omega whenever he talked about his past. Frederick's presence always brought forth an amusing tale from the Graham family archives and a different kind of emotion from Will. Deep down Hannibal acknowledged his growing Alphan instinct to make Will exclusively his but conscious the cost could be the exclusion of everyone from Will's past, the step would always be too far for the progressive Alpha. Hannibal wasn't sure he would warm to Frederick but since their talk in the hospital, Frederick's determination to put Will's interest first had impressed the Alpha and persuaded Hannibal to crack open the door to the idea of friendship. He knew Frederick's concern for the Omega's well-being was genuine but the Beta's intentional waspish gibes and finicky disposition, kept Hannibal on guard.

"*All he needs to complete the look is a long boat and a horned helmet."* Frederick had hissed the taunt earlier to Will whilst the Alpha was within earshot. Hannibal just rolled his shoulders, ignoring the remark, but later catching his own reflection in the mirror, bearded and hair unkempt, he saw the truth and the humour in Frederick's observation. Hannibal decided to settle into a tolerance of the man even if the Beta wouldn't make it easy. The guilt tinged reminder of Franklyn's social isolation due to his irritating personality was never far from Hannibal's mind whenever he thought of Frederick. Consequentially he had no doubt he could make a little room in his life to accommodate the Beta.

Will's response to Crawford's report wasn't the one Robert had been expecting.

"They're wrong."

"Which part is wrong, William? All or part of it?" Robert asked as a sinking feeling in his stomach began to weigh him down.

"This isn't Jack's report. He didn't conduct the investigation. This is some two bit sheriff's office trying to twist the facts to close the case. The cops in the South made a living out of looking the other way where Hobbs was concerned. As long as his victims were Omegas, they couldn't give a damn. There's no DNA, not even a forensic examination of the car. They surmise Hobbs got drunk and crashed or some rival gang paid him back." Will closed the folder and handed it back to Robert. "It doesn't hold true. They got it sideways."

Robert's hopes that his son-in-law would finally feel safe were slowly being crushed. "William, they identified the body. You cannot put yourself in a denial position."

"Killing Abigail, yeah, that's believable but saying he went on a spending spree cause he had folded money in his wallet..." Will shook his head. "That's not his way."

"I have also read the report, Will, they have security footage of Hobbs purchasing expensive goods. The car which crashed, the dealer identified Hobbs as the buyer." Hannibal tried his persuasive best to change the boy's opinion.

"If Garrett read TattleCrime and found Abigail had betrayed him and stashed money away, he sure as hell would have killed her. But don't you see, he would have known I was married. Lounds wrote about it. Sure he'd get fired up about the marriage but that picture Lounds published, I look so damned happy, it would've been like adding gasoline to a fire. You don't know Hobbs, he'd stamp me with an expiration date and come after me with a vengeance."

Hannibal could see a spark of anger in boy's eyes. "You admire Jack Crawford and after looking at the evidence he believes Hobbs is dead. Look at the evidence, Will, through Jack's eyes."

"I'm not going to believe anything but my gut feeling. Cause if I'm right, I'm not going to escape this."

"Well?" Robert inquired after Will had left the room on the pretext of hearing his son cry. "If he is alive, do you believe that Hobbs would run the risk of capture by coming here?"

"No, but Will does."

"And if the authorities are wrong and the man is not dead?"

Casually turning the wedding ring on his finger, Hannibal asked. "Do you still have your revolver?"

Beverly stood in the doorway. Whether sitting or standing, Jack always retained his military posture. Studying the reports on his desk, the Alpha reminded her of a general signing battle orders.

"Yes?" He said without looking up, his keen sense of smell telling him she was present.

Beverly crossed the room casually. "Will doesn't believe it."

"Will doesn't believe what?"

"Will doesn't believe Garrett Jacob Hobbs is chilling out in a Texas morgue."

Jack gave a deep sigh which transformed into an "Oh."

"I take it he has the facts to back up his belief?" The Alpha asked.

"Hobbs behaviour leading up to his death. According to Will it was "out of character."

"People change. The Garrett Jacob Hobbs that Will knew probably disappeared after incarceration. Jail does that to you."

"Jack, what we have from the South isn't definitive."

"You're doubting their experts."

"Not doubting, just not one hundred per cent convinced."

"Convince me I'm wrong to be convinced."

"Okay, Abigail is dead. That's a certainty. But Hobbs? Jeez, Jack the body was cooked. No DNA, just a surgical implant in the leg."

"We've confirmed identities from less." Jack's voice edged towards tetchy.

"Yes, but this is Hobbs. Murdered by a rival? It was you who said he was damned slippery. Will won't stop looking over his shoulder until he's sure Hobbs is dead. Right?"

Jack stared at her, visage emotion free, weighing up her remarks. "How do you propose we convince Will that the son of a bitch is really dead ?"

"I could fly to Houston, dig deeper..." Beverly crossed her arms and tilted her head to her left. "but I'd need your blessing."

Jack scrutinised her face before replying. "Consider yourself blessed."

Fifteen days into his recovery, Donald had remembered the reason for his nephew's visit on the day of the attack and had insisted Isabella's collar be delivered to DuMaurier house. Aware Omegas were unpredictable when confronted by a surprise, Hannibal had trod carefully, gradually relating how the jewellery had been traced and ended up in his possession. Opening the shiny black box, Will was a mixture of smiles and tears.

"My dad said he chose it cause the colour matched my mom's eyes." Threaded onto a silver chain the lapis lazuli cords were a deep, rich blue and Will had inspected it, smelt it, pressed it to his lips before finding a safe place to store it.

Hannibal had noticed Will's quiet demeanour since reading the report but the boy then brightened seemingly overnight, explaining he was tired of worrying about things which may never happen, they returned to their normal routine.

"*if I wore it Hobbs wouldn't hurt me"* when the fragment of a previous conversation suddenly played through the Alpha's mind late at night he knew how deep the fear had burrowed inside the boy. As Hannibal visualised the events over the previous days, the

sick realisation slowly dawned that the ring of blue was now a permanent fixture around the Omega's neck.

Beverly cursed her luck at having to deal with a medical examiner who, to show his Alpha superiority, attempted to belittle her at every turn.

"She's FBI, Travis. She's seen bodies before." Coop rolled his eyes.

Wearing the ubiquitous cowboy hat and boots, Sheriff Cooper *"Call me Coop"* Smith's languorous style at first led Beverly to believe he was indifferent but an hour into his company she realised his laid back approach didn't stop him from extracting every scrap of information from her. Although Beverly was grateful for his aid, she could tell he was losing patience because of the squabbling. Eventually she was allowed to peek at Abigail while Travis Jarvis, Chief Medical Examiner, took a great deal of time reiterating how the body had been found in the freezer.

"We had one of those in Baltimore." Beverly couldn't resist competing. "He was a bitch to defrost."

"They say three and it's a trend." Coop added his own brand of humour.

Beverly read the report, blunt force trauma to the back of the head, no sexual assault. Hobbs may have been an obsessive father who had killed his only child but somehow, although she knew it was crazy, she thought better of him for not crossing another line.

"You don't want to see this." Jarvis said standing next to the drawer which contained the killer whose identity was in question.

"I've seen plenty of corpses in my time." She drummed her nails on the metal cabinet. "Was he oven baked or crispy fried."

"Burnt to a frazzle."

Bev returned fire in the pissing contest, describing her first Ripper kill and the way the eyeballs had hung out of their sockets. A few more rounds of who had seen the most gruesome and bizarre prompted Coop to step forward and yank open the drawer.

"Some discussions you don't want to hear just after you've eaten."

As Beverly looked at the charred remains which was no worse than others she had examined, Jarvis waved the titanium rod he held in his hand. "We tracked the serial number to the hospital where one Garrett Jacob Hobbs had this beauty inserted."

"No DNA follow up? Right?"

"Expensive besides we have the murder weapon with his prints all over it. Garrett Jacob Hobbs is not our problem. The actual crimes he was finally charged with took place outside

the state of Texas. We have plenty of psychos, alive and kicking, killing our own." Jarvis replied defiantly.

"He murdered his daughter then paid the price in full." Coop drawled "We call it Texas Justice."

Beverly pondered if by our own, Travis had meant Alphas but she decided to keep silent to maintain the entente cordiale that currently existed between Jack Crawford and the Southern State of Texas.

"Listen, missy, I don't want the bodies, the next of kin don't want them either. If the FBI wants to give them a good home then get Vernon Hobbs to sign off on the paperwork and we'll release them to you pronto. Hell, I'll even gift wrap their caskets and tie on pretty bows if it gets them out of my hair."

Beverly looked again at the rod then the paperwork and using Will's words said. "It doesn't feel like the way Hobbs was supposed to die."

Coop adjusted the brim of his hat. "Maybe he wanted to go out in a blaze of glory."

"Will it ever change here?" Beverly asked as they drove towards the farm house. "I mean the way Omegas are treated."

Coop didn't take his eyes off the bumpy track finding navigation tricky. "It already has. Next year the Omega Health Board will be operating in all the states and will be run by Omegas only."

"But the board members are being given special status. Right? It's not that they are considered equals."

"It'll change. It's just that we go about it in our own way. When Angelina, Chambers and Jasper counties gave Omegas the right to vote in municipal elections there was an outcry, since then over a hundred and fifty counties have gone down the same route."

"Yeah, but the discrimination, it's so blatant."

"I guess us Southerners are not as clever as you in the north. You fine tuned the prejudice to make it discreet."

Beverly huffed testily. "You can't seriously believe we're on par with Texas or Louisiana. Omegas have rights and they're expanding under Sutcliffe."

Cooper cursed as the back of his vehicle swerved as it hit a depression in the road. "Sure they have more rights but only when it suits Alphas. You're just taking your pets for a few extra walks."

Beverly looked out of the side window terminating the conversation, knowing trying to change Cooper's point of view was a lost cause. As the house loomed into view she thought

of Will and understood why he never wanted to return to the place of his birth.

Vernon Jacob Hobbs was a tall, brown haired man with a light handshake and a noticeable air of impatience. "Where do I sign?"

"You understand, Verne, the bodies will be handed over to the FBI. That was the agreement." Cooper Smith stated.

"Good riddance and damn the both of them. Caused me and my family nothing but grief. Bringing trash reporters to my door, wanting answers to their questions."

Beverly's statement "You weren't close then" brought a burst of laughter from Vernon.

"From the day he took his first steps, Garrett was nothing but trouble." Vernon took the pen which was proffered and signed on the line. "Do you believe evil can be passed down through the generations, Agent Katz?"

"Can't say I've thought about it."

"My father was a good man, a hard worker. He loved my mom, called her his Omega princess." Vernon smiled at the memory. "We had a good life, nothing fancy, but my parents had a wholesome outlook and they encouraged it in us youngsters. Then my father died and being an Omega, momma was not allowed to raise Alpha sons on her own, so we went to live with our Alpha grandfather, Daddy Hobbs. That man was pure evil, his sole purpose seemed to be to make our lives hell. In the middle of the night he would stand outside the bedroom door, scratch at the wood and croak your name. Sometimes he'd wait until you were asleep then creep into the room and scream in your ear. It got so, I stay awake listening, waiting for a noise on the stairs, knowing Daddy was coming. The longer we stayed the more I realised everything about him was wrong."

Beverly braced herself to stop any pity bleeding out for Garrett Jacob Hobbs as Vernon continued. "He beat us boys for no reason but when I found him beating my mom, I knew we had to get out of there. Took Austin and Mikey with us but Garrett refused to leave. By then he was brimming with Daddy's weird notions and started to behave in the same twisted manner. Eight months later, supposedly by his own hand, Daddy was dead because the blast from a shotgun took off the top of his head. That's when Garrett returned, only he wasn't on his own, he was trailing Daddy's shadow behind him."

"You're saying his upbringing turned him into a killer."

"No, ma'am, I'm saying, like our grandfather, he was another bad seed. We get that a lot in this family. I married a widow woman with kids of her own and told her from the start she'd get none from me. I'd made sure that I would never pass this sickness on and Mikey followed my lead."

Beverly digested Vernon's words. "Your brother's body was found not far from here."

Vernon handed back the paperwork. "I've gone over this with the Sheriff's office. Last time I saw Garrett he was in jail. He wanted to see me and I thought maybe he was sorry but all he

talked about was that Omega kid, the one he took, wanted me to track him down and drag him back here. The way he spoke, you'd have thought they were bonded. I just high tailed it out of there and never looked back."

Beverly felt icy fingers stroking the back of her neck. "Did your brothers keep in contact with him?"

"Mikey got probation for being around Garrett at the wrong time. Last I heard from him he had moved out of state and was working in construction. As for Austin, he lives one town over and rents some rooms. He's probably not the sharpest tool in the box, but he was into petty crime not violence so he shied away from Garrett too. I guess out of all of us, he'd be the only one Garrett was likely to call on, that's if he could find him. Austin, when the mood takes and the money rolls in, drifts from town to town."

"Would Austin track down the Omega boy if asked?"

"The way his mind works I doubt if Austin could find his own ass with both his hands." Vernon looked sheepish. "I ain't being uncharitable, he's always been slow but after the accident, he got worse."

Cooper spoke for Beverly who stood with her mouth open. "How bad were his injuries?"

"Oh, he was smashed up good. Took months before he could walk again. Automobile accident. That kind of shit happens when you're driving drunk."

"Would Austin, maybe, have had a reason to swap identities with Garrett. Say for insurance purposes." Cooper watched as the other man slowly nodded his head.

"Sure, when they were younger they did it all the time. They looked like two peas in a pod. If there was an arrest warrant out for one and they got stopped, they'd pretend to be the other."

"Please don't, Will." Bedelia said.

Will withdrew his outstretched arm and placed his cell back into his shirt pocket.

"Is there a problem?" Hannibal was surprised to hear his mother admonish the boy.

"Mister Price has been sending Will messages, witticisms, which Will has taken upon himself to share with your father."

"Are they inappropriate?" Hannibal glanced at the Omega who sat next to him with head bowed.

"By inappropriate, if you mean just before your father falls asleep they drift into his mind and he chuckles, then yes I would consider them inappropriate. Your father has always had trouble with homophones and as these jokes are dependent on their understanding, he sometimes takes time deciphering the context."

"Harmless fun." Robert protested.

"Not for the person who is kept from her sleep by your chuckling." Bedelia replied as Robert kissed her cheek and moved his chair back from the table. "And Robert, frogs cannot drive motor vehicles therefore cannot illegally park."

Muffled laughter from Will brought a smile to Robert's face. "If the boy get hiccups from eating his breakfast whilst laughing then you are to blame, my darling."

"You and Will are incorrigible. You share the same silly sense of humour."

"The meetings at the White House can be very tense. I find the occasional display of humour helps ease the situation."

Bedelia inwardly squirmed. "Please, please tell me you're not sharing these with the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

"No, no, of course not, my darling. Just a few generals and the odd Ambassador or two. Now I have to hurry as Agent Green has been outside for the last twenty minutes and if I don't appear soon he'll be imaging something's amiss. I shall be late, my darling, so don't wait up."

Will knew how to keep Alana cheery whilst she waited for him to fetch the items he needed. With Andrius settled on her lap, he could hear his sister-in-law's soothing the baby with her positive talking technique as he returned to the sitting room. Will was filled with emotion observing Alana beam a smile at his son as the baby's tiny hand grasped her finger.

"Has he voiced his political leanings yet?" Will checked the messenger bag, making sure he had adequate diapers and wipes.

"He's responding to certain words. It is an established fact the earlier you to talk to a child, the better their word skills when older. It helps them realise their development potential. It is also a priming tool to help them recognize the faces of their care givers."

"I have an easier way." Will said as he bent down in front of Alana. Will's purring was enough to earn several kicks of the feet from Andrius and a squeal of delight.

"That's unfair." Alana tapped Will playfully on the arm. "Effective but unfair."

"What is unfair?" Hannibal asked as he entered the sitting room.

"I was just showing Alana the Omegan shortcut to helping babies recognize faces." Will pushed himself up, mischievously giving a short burst of purring, he walked to the Alpha.

"Are you sure you are comfortable with me staying behind this time?"

"Positive." Will grabbed the bag and hoisted over his shoulder. "You finish your report. You said yourself it will be quicker at home than the office. Besides, this is the last of the scheduled weekly checks with Doctor Tocca so if she tries to bamboozle me with medical jargon, I'll have an interpreter on hand."

Will noticed how Hannibal took his time looking over his face as if he was trying to memorise every square inch. "Call me the moment you arrive."

Will had lost count of the number times when the occupants of the household arrived at the same spot at the same time. Bedelia and Alana, walking side by side in front of him, agreed that Alana should exit from the garage first and as they reached the doorway, Will heard the coughing and sneezing from Zeller as he descended the stairs.

"Are you better?" Bedelia turned to face her son.

"Over the worst." Zeller rasped. "I'll rest and dose myself up. Should be back at work in a couple of days."

"Hannibal's made you chicken soup." Bedelia informed him. "He'll warm it for you when you're ready."

With the constant trickle of memories from his childhood always accessible, Will was aware it was the small touches which showed the easy going familiarity and love felt within this group. He stored the brief conversation, knowing without words, Hannibal had expressed his love for his brother.

Alana paused at the end of the drive, like her mother she was a cautious driver, especially when carrying the treasured passenger asleep in his carrier. She noted the vehicle parked a little way to their right, confident it wasn't about to pull out, she began to execute the turn. It was a midsized SUV which had seen better days, dirt and dents decorated it's body. Without warning it sped into action and swerved blocking the road. As Alana braked, Will caught the driver's face and in one breath screamed.

"Go back, go back."

Alana saw the car door open and the split second the gun came into view, she acted on Will's instructions and powered the car back along the drive until they screeched to a stop. Will, quickly at the rear door, opened it and unclipped the baby seat with lighting speed. With Alana by his side and a bewildered Bedelia standing near the garage, Will could see the man bearing down on them. Forcing the handle of the carrier into Alana's hand, Will growled.

"Get inside now."

Will strode towards the intruder, his mind whirring back to the mind set of the mercurial young Omega who Garrett Jacob Hobbs had once adored. They met halfway and with the Alpha aiming the gun at it's intended target, Will resurrected the pretty little boy smile in an attempt to buy time.

"You let them take me." He snarled as he kept his distance, glaring at the Alpha, then slowly circling he forced the man to shift his body position to keep the Omega in the line of fire.

With the gun pointing at him and only a few feet between them, Will locked eyes with the Alpha, aware if he lied, he would die. "I screamed for you when they tried to open the cage but you had deserted me, turned tail and run."

Hobbs, one unsteady hand holding the weapon, the other deep in his pocket, opened his mouth but seemed lost for words. Allowing his empathy to dictate his every word and action, Will recalled the Southern Belle aura he had adopted whenever he had engaged Hobbs in verbal brawling.

"You were supposed to protect me." Will purred. "You promised me nobody would hurt me, Alpha."

Hobbs pulled his lips into a smile. "You moved on. Got yourself another."

"I had no choice. They were planning to send me back south." Will kept his voice shy of over dramatic, parading the right level of haughty defiance. "You know what they would have done with me. Bred me then killed me."

"Seems to me you've landed right. All loved up." Hobbs growled. "Got yourself a pup."

"Lecter married me for my land not for love." Will whined and took another step, glimpsing briefly Bedelia nearly at the house. "I was alone, you know what that did to me. Said he'll give me only two and then he's done breeding me. That's how much he wants me."

The thudding in Will's chest was off the chart and he tightly fisted his hands so their shaking wouldn't expose his fear but as Hobbs spoke, Will knew the weakening had begun. "Two? You were made to be bred. He doesn't deserve something as precious as you."

"Precious." Will snorted out a laugh. "If I was precious to you there wouldn't be a gun between us. You came here to finish me like Abigail."

"The lying whore betrayed me."

"I didn't." Remembering Franklyn, Will stepped forward until the snout of the pistol pressed into his abdomen. "They wanted me to lie. Say you killed my family. Testify against you. I refused."

"You spinning me a yarn?"

"My name wasn't on the witness list. Didn't that make you curious?" Speaking with a velvet drawl, Will undid the top two buttons of his shirt exposing the collar. "Every morning when I place this around my neck, I think only of you. I knew you would come here to rescue me."

Will felt the gun being lowered, heard the click of the safety pushed back on and saw the look of awe on the face of Hobbs. "You'd come with me. Willingly?"

Will adapted and with a hypnotic smile and seductive growl, he replied. "I have plenty of money, we could leave now, travel anywhere and start a new life."

"They'd hunt us down."

"I'd leave a note explaining how I feel about you. Almost polite." Will gazed deep into the Alpha's eyes. "Believe me or leave me. Your choice."

The instant Will turned towards the sound of running and saw Hannibal closing the gap, he knew he had made a mistake. His mask slipped as a gasp of relief escaped. Looking back Garrett Jacob Hobbs had gone, instead a spectre from the Alpha's past stood in his place. Will looked for a faint glimmer of the man who had held him captive, the man he could influence but now only vitriolic hatred filled his sight. As Hobbs moved his arm, Will lunged forward and grabbed the man's wrist, twisting it until the gun clattered to the ground. Wrenched back until he hit the Alpha's chest, he saw the hand flash across his face. The knife plunged into his neck and began slicing the flesh as Will's hand flailed in an attempt to save his own life. The explosions sounded close to his ear and his world was spinning around him in confusion as he slid to the ground. The shouting, hands on his neck, a soothing voice melded and as he gasped for air that didn't reach his lungs, sheer terror made his heart race.

"Stay with me, Will, keep your eyes open." Hannibal gripped his hand, Zeller's voice echoed above him and as the Omega looked into Hannibal's eyes, his vision blurred before he tipped into the darkness.

"Will, honey, you be careful now. You watch him, Andy." His mother's voice rang out from the river bank.

"He'll be fine, Bella." His father replied. "He's safe with me."

Will, just above elbow high, looked up at the man at his side and as his father cast his line into the stream, his face relaxed into a smile.

"I've made all your favourites, including cherry pie." Will's mouth started to water as he laid back on the plaid rug spread on the ground, content to watch his mother unpack the hamper and Marissa tie back her long black hair.

Georgia yelled. "Come on, goose, race you to the tree." As Will took off after his sister and glimpsed the figure on the horizon, he was sure the danger had passed.

"You're all grown up." Andrew called out as Will picked up his fishing rod and waded back into the stream. He noticed the clouds gathering as he watched the Alpha, silhouetted in the distance, coming closer.

Andrew placed a hand on the boy's shoulder, his way of reassuring. "He's a good catch, Will, a keeper. Don't throw him back."

The baby cried until Isabella took him in her arms, rocking him gently, she sang a lullaby which Will remembered from when he was a child.

Andrew's eyes shone with pride. "He's going to be taller than me."

Will hadn't thought to protest when his mother placed the baby back in his care saying "We'll wait here for you, Will, honey, but it's time to say goodbye."

He could still feel the soft kisses on his skin and warmth of their hugs as his eyes fluttered open to the call of his name. Making jarring sense of the clinical surroundings, a tear escaped and trickled down his face.

Hannibal had sat by his side for the full five days, replaying in his mind the image of Zeller trying to staunch the bleeding, while assuring him Will was a survivor. The hospital was quieter during the evening and it was then he would hear Will murmuring, talking to his lost family, before succumbing to stillness once more. Omegan twilight syndrome they had called it when after two days Will hadn't regained consciousness, a place where the Omegan mind would retreat after enduring a traumatic event. A state of limbo where the Omega could disengage from emotional distress and develop coping mechanisms. How long it would last, they could not estimate, it could be hours, days, months or even years at it's most extreme.

Hannibal had talked at length about his plans for their future together, updated Will on the progress of their son, read the Tales of the Riverboat and the Journey of Tadas and Angelius until his voice gave out. The Lecters had taken turns watching Will, allowing Hannibal some much needed respite, but the Alpha stayed anxious until he was back by his Omega's side. Frederick had visited daily, sombre and sorrowful at first, being reminded of the loss of the Graham family. Soon he had gotten into his stride as he recounted his fishing trips with Andrew or how he had fainted after opening his bedroom closet door only to find the scarecrow Georgia had hidden, staring menacingly back at him.

Jack Crawford visited just once. He had relayed how the FBI believed Hobbs, after murdering Abigail, had obsessed about killing Will and had persuaded his brother to swap identities in order to obtain an alibi. They believed his plan was to travel north and find the Omega then, once he had committed the act, return south and resume his life. Of course he couldn't anticipate Austin would get drunk and crash his vehicle or that a neighbour, hearing Garrett was dead, would break into the Hobbs house to reclaim some of his goods that had been stolen and discovered a body in a freezer instead. Neither could Hobbs have predicted he would be rushed into a sloppy attempt to murder the boy because Freddie Lounds had plastered his face across the internet.

Andrius grew more fractious each day, being separated from Will. Hannibal brought the baby into the hospital room, but his mewling had turned into screaming when the Omega failed to respond to him. Later cradling his son in his arm, Hannibal had taken Will's hand and pressed it to his lips, allowing the baby to scent the pulse point, the Omega's sweet cherry aroma flooded the room. Will had moved his head in the direction of Andrius as his

son held out a tiny hand, then the eyelids of the Omega had fluttered rapidly before they eventually opened.

"You are back." Hannibal said, his eyes moist from the profound feeling of joy.

"Yeah." Will took a few deep breaths as looked at his Alphas, father and son, seated next to him. "I missed my family."

Everything was different, strange different when he returned home. The DuMaurier house felt alien, new to him, like the first day of school. He kept up appearances, smiling when he thought appropriate but the constant *"Are you alright, Will?"* inquiries where beginning to grate. The first night he slept on the sofa couch watching his son breathe, then a second and a third until Hannibal stood in the doorway, dressed only in pyjama bottoms. When his question *"Is there is a problem, Will?"* was met with stony silence, he returned alone to his bed.

Lounds was in her element as her story unfurled across the screen, the horror, the drama, with Hobbs depicted as a vengeful monster instead of a lovesick Alpha trying desperately to win back his mate. Delayed shock hit him concrete hard and as the baby cried in his crib, Will stood immobilised until his hands covered his ears and he sank to the floor. His wailing filled the house, only coming to a halt after Hannibal was beside him, pulling him into his lap then petting him into silence.

He retreated to his meditation room when he recovered, slamming the door in Hannibal's face when he tried to follow. Sitting in the darkness, his knees pulled up into a hug, his only company was the figure of Garrett Jacob Hobbs.

"You miss me." The Alpha gloated.

Will shook his head. "I miss my family, I don't miss you."

"We would have made a great team, boy, I would have been invincible with you by my side." The Alpha slithered.

As the projector in his head whirled to life, Will could see them stalking then killing their prey, their rivals at first, then eventually those weaker or younger. He would have had to wear a smile for the Alpha, pay homage, praise him daily and gratefully lap it up when Hobbs called him his pretty little boy.

"You blackmailed me into sweetness and affection, that was the only way I could stay alive."

"You were tricking me, boy, so they'd catch me and stick a needle in my arm. You act all innocent but there is hatred inside."

"I didn't want you just dead, I wanted you to suffer." Will shouted. "It was all your fault. You're responsible. You made it all happen."

"Is that why you're angry, boy, because I died too fast." Hobbs taunted.

"Yes." Will hissed. "I wanted to hear you scream and beg for your life like I screamed and begged McGreevy not to kill my mom."

"Next time, boy, kill by your own hand, not by proxy. Then you can make them scream, make them beg, be like me."

Will scrambled to his feet and opening the door, spat back the words into the empty room. "You can never hurt anyone again, so I won. Lights out. Game over. You're dead."

Hannibal was brushing his teeth when he became aware of Will standing in the bathroom doorway. Completing the process, he rinsed his mouth, then his toothbrush before wiping his mouth dry.

"We need to talk." The Omega was wearing his shirt and jeans minus his shoes and socks and Hannibal wondered if Will's waif-like image represented his emotional state. "I need an honest answer."

Without waiting for the Alpha to respond, Will took a few steps closer until he could smell the scent of the Alpha. "Did you kill Garrett in cold blood?"

"My answer, will it impact on our relationship?"

Will's stare was unflinching. "I need to know."

Hannibal could see the determination on the boy's face. "When Alana shouted you were being held at gunpoint, the lesson I learned from Sutcliffe House came into force. This time I did not follow my instincts and rush blindly into a fray, instead I came prepared. When I saw the knife and your blood, I was left with no choice."

"You could have tried to disarm him, wound him."

"You may be the boundary of good behaviour, Will, but when someone you love is being hurt, rational thinking does not apply. Be under no illusion, you could not see the triumphant look on his face, he was going to kill you. I love you, Will and I was not about to gamble with your life."

Will walked forward and rested the side of his face against the Alpha's chest, finally admitting the truth, he sighed. "I'm glad Hobbs is dead."

In his mind Will saw a door to his past closing as Hannibal's arms enveloped him and the Alpha replied. "So am I."

"Are you checking my ass?" Will huffed as he took the shirt from the closet.

"You have a beautiful ass, Will." The Omega quickly glanced over his shoulder to see the Alpha wearing nothing but a smile as he lay stretched out on their bed.

"You better hurry. It may be a late breakfast but you're cutting it fine."

Will heard the movement then the Alpha, now behind him, wrapped the Omega into a hug, Will wriggled against the athletic body feeling the shiver shoot through him.

"I'm not gonna weaken, Alpha, the answer is no." Will murmured as the lips made contact with his neck.

Hannibal's hands caressed his mate. "Shame, but I can still enjoy trying to change your mind."

Will knew Hannibal was always trying to be by his side, the smallest gesture designed to bring happiness into the Omega's life. Still emotionally naked, a touch or a look from the Alpha kept him anchored in the present or looking forward to their future instead of dwelling on the past.

As Will attempted to put the wriggling Andrius into his high chair, the rest of the family began to take their places in the dining room. The smell of the cooking wafted through the open door and Will's stomach began to rumble in anticipation. Like everyone, he was amazed when Valdas sauntered unexpectedly into DuMaurier house.

"Where's my nephew." He called out after Bedelia had finished hugging him.

With the infant still in his arms, Will was engulfed by the loving embrace and his brother-in-law muttered as he held onto them. "Don't scare me like that again."

The whole day filled with chatter and laughter. Bedelia and Hannibal cooked up a storm with each of their impromptu dishes being quickly praised before being devoured. Valdas after finishing his call to his uncle announced that a fishing trip had been arranged.

"A quiet day fishing." Robert smiled at his son. "You, me, Will, Donald, Agent Green and of course, half the secret service. I understand if any of us need to urinate in the bushes, the agents, to ensure our safety, form themselves into a neat circle around us."

With the image imprinted in his head, Will had dissolved into a fit of giggles, laughing helplessly as the tears rolled down his face. Later, when Will had touched the gauze which covered the scar and commented that Hobbs had always said he would mark the Omega, Robert had gently chided him.

"It is not his mark, William, it is your badge of courage. You probably saved the lives of my grandson, my daughter and my beloved wife." Robert gazed warmly at the boy. "The old saying *'the apples don't fall far from the tree'* applies to the Graham family as bravery flows down the generations. Like father, like son."

By the time Will had settled in his bed and his mind was filled with reminiscences of the Lecter family, the nightmares which once were ready to plague his sleep had been crowded out.

"I love you, Han." Will whispered into the darkness.

Hannibal moved position, his nose pressed into the Omega's curls as his murmured. "I love you too, Will."

With Hannibal's arm around him holding him tight, Will no longer felt alone.

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End Notes

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